Richard Cable
The Lightshipman

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

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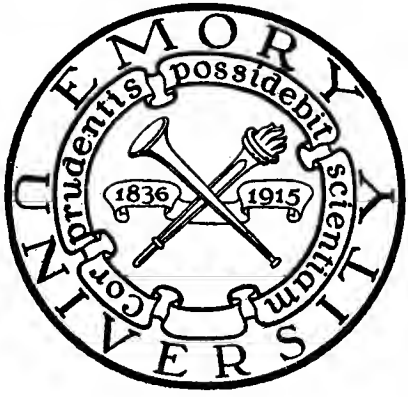

RICHARD CABLE

VOL. I.

RICHARD CABLE

THE LIGHTSHIPMAN

BY THE AUTHOR OF

'MEHALAH' 'JOHN HERRING' 'COURT ROYAL'

ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

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THE FIRST VOLUME.

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RICHARD CABLE.

CHAPTER I.

THE LIGHTSHIP.

In the cabin of a lightship off the Essex coast sat Richard Cable, knitting a baby's sock or boot. The sock was small, so small that when he thrust his great thumb into it, his thumb filled it.

'Thirteenth row,' said Richard Cable. 'One, two, three, four,' he began aloud, and went from four to forty-seven in decreasing tone, reaching finally an inaudible whisper. Then he raised his voice again: 'Two together; one, two, three, four, five, six. Two together; one, two, three, four.' His tones died away again. He moved his lips; but no sound issued from them till he reached forty-seven, and that he uttered as if it exploded on his lips. Richard Cable was a fine, strongly-

built, well-proportioned man, about half-way between thirty and forty, with brown curly hair, and eyes of clear blue. His face was tanned with exposure; but the nape of his neck, as visible, now that his head was bent over the knitting-needles, was of a nutty brown, many degrees redder than his face. He wore a knitted blue worsted jersey, with a pair of thick warm dark-blue loose trousers beneath and below the jersey. On his head was a round, brimless sailor's cap, with ribbons behind. He had shoes on his feet and white stockings.

Although he was about thirty-five, he had all the freshness of youth about him, and not a trace of care, not the furrow of a trial on his honest brow. The mouth was firm; but as he knitted he smiled with the most pleasant smile. His face was agreeable, kindly, open; however roughened by wind and spray, its expression was gentle, now especially so, as it was turned to the baby-sock.

'Fourteenth row,' said Cable, 'plain.—Darn the boy! I wish he were back.'

Cable was not on deck; he was, as already said, in his cabin, and the light fell on him from above. When he raised his eyes, he could see the blue sky through the deck-lights; and across the strip of blue sky, white

flakes of clouds were flying fast, like swans and Brent geese on their autumnal migration.

'Fifteenth row. One, two, three, four.' Cable began very loud, but went *diminuendo* as he progressed. He also emphasised the first few numbers; but he slurred over the next, and only recovered emphasis at the last. When he came to forty-seven, he changed the position of his feet, and said: 'Knit two together. One, two, three, four. Two together—Darn him! What creatures boys are to eat; who'd ever thought of his gorging all the bread! 'Tis too provoking to have to send for more.'

The lightship lay about four miles off the shore, the low flat shore of Essex, near the little fishing-port of Hanford, a port so insignificant, carrying on so little trade, that Trinity House ignored it, and would do nothing for it, not even concern itself about the entrance to the harbour, and take on it the charge of the lightship. This vessel was stationed where it was, manned, and supplied by the Hanfordites. It was a convenience to them, that is, to the oyster and fishing vessels which put out from the little place on Monday and came home on Saturday.

The sea on the Essex coast is shallow, so shallow that it cannot form a wave on the

margin large enough to sweep away the frail dike that has been thrown up to oppose further invasion.

Through the shallows outside Hanford ran one deep line of water, and at the entrance to this lay the lightship. The coast-line was marked in that random in-and-out course which prevails in hedge demarcation inland; land was divided from water in a loose and arbitrary fashion, without the existence of any physical reason why one patch should be accounted land and another sea. What was arable was arable only because it lay behind the dike; and on the other side of the bank were acres of land as good that might have been reclaimed. There were three stages in which the soil stood: for a mile out seaward were flats on which grew seaweed, overwashed by every tide; nearer land, in creeks and estuaries, were flats of the same soil that grew thrift and sea-lavender and glasswort, and where occasionally sheep were sent to browse. These patches were only covered at very high tides. Then came the seawall; and behind that was pasture and arable land, and the water only swept over the bank upon it once in ten, fifteen, or twenty years, when high-tide coincided with an inshore gale.

The outer flats grew their own crops; but

the crops were distinctively marine, a long ribbon weed and winkles. After every gale, the weed and countless winkles were swept ashore in black wreaths, and the weed whitened in the sun to a thin ash-like film.

'Sixteenth row, knit plain.'

On the seaface of the seawall a strip of sand and gravel ran the length of the coast, varying in width from a foot to half a dozen yards. Between this beach and the clay beds lay a depression, scooped by the retreating current as the tide went out, filled with black slime, formed of decomposed seaweed and winkles, dead crabs, and all the refuse of the sea that it washed up and could not withdraw again. The flats grown over with winkles, thick as daisies in a meadow, formed a happy hunting-ground for boys and girls alike, who went out on them with 'splashers' on their feet to gather shellfish. The splasher is a flat board fastened to the foot; on it the mud can be traversed by human beings as easily as by webfooted aquatic birds.

'Seventeenth row! One, two—— Drat that boy!'

Richard Cable stood up, laid his knitting down on a locker and went on deck. He looked landwards. A line of foam marked where the deep sea broke over the submerged

banks of clay. A glare of sun was on a belt of willows, that seemed white, against a gloomy mass of vapour that hung on the horizon. The trees were five or six miles distant; but they were perfectly visible, and looked against the dark background like tufts of cotton-grass.

'Ah!' said Richard Cable, 'there he comes. I can see the boat. If he don't look smart, the squall will be on him and capsize him before he gets here.'

The lightship was rolling and straining. The wind was rising. From the bed of black cloud lines extended, shadow rays over the sky. The sea seemed to be uneasy, and had become fretful. The brightness was gone from the day, the colour from the water.

'Darn the boy!' said Cable, looking aloft. 'We shall have dirty weather on us in ten minutes, and he not here. Then he returned to the cabin and resumed the knitting-pins and the little sock. He had done the tiny foot; he put his fingers into it and turned it about and looked at it. The fellow was already done, in white wool, and lay on a polished ash-wood stool. He took it up and measured the sole of the sock he was knitting by the other foot. 'Right you are,' he said;

then, after a pause: 'By ginger! it does seem a time to be away from the little 'uns—a whole fortnight. I don't know how I should manage it, if I hadn't the knitting of their socks and stockings to keep me in mind of their little pattering feet. What a beauty the baby is! That she is, indeed, and nobody can deny it!' Then he sighed. 'Poor Polly!' and he wiped his eye with the sole of the little sock he was knitting. 'Drat it!' said he; 'I've dropped a stitch. Eighteenth row. First two together. Lord! what wonderful little toes the baby has got. They're like a row of peas in a pod, only no green about them, pink instead; and then, the little nails! what mites they be, to be sure, not half-quarter so big as one of my stitches. And to see the way the baby works his toes, just as though he'd be as handy with them as with fingers. This little pig went to market; this little pig stayed at home; this little pig had roast beef——No! Baby hasn't got to that pitch of reason and understanding that she can count her toes and take in all about the pigs. She's not equal to Pat-a-cake Baker's man yet. What a pleasure it will be when she's old enough to laugh at Pat-a-cake!—Darn the boy! Not here yet, and the gale is on us.'

The ship was struck by a great wave, and a blast of wind screamed over it.

'He's been dawdling, that he has. He ought to have been back with the bread an hour agone. What a plague boys are! It's a mystery how ever reliable, sensible men grow out of such untrustworthy louts; but then the plant and the seedling differ in every particular.' He put down the sock again. 'I can't get along of my knitting because of Trinity House. Why doesn't Trinity House take the light upon its hands? Then it would not be undermanned; I should not be left here, alone with a hulking, scatterbrained boy. I must go on deck and have another look after him.'

He climbed the ladder. The aspect of the sky and sea was changed. The sky was overcast with black whirling vapours; the sea, from being fretful, was angry; a shadow as of an impending woe crept over the face of nature.

The wind was off shore, so that the waves were not considerable; but behind the spit of land and the willows the coast bent away to the south, and the wind was able to heap up the waters there and roll them round in a sort of race beyond the spit, a line of leaping, shaking, angry tumblers, dark as ink when not

maned with foam, meeting and driving back the muddy, churned wavelets that were swept outwards from the shallow shore and mud-flats.

'Blow that boy! If he gets swamped, his mother will lay all the blame on me for certain.' He stood clutching the bulwarks, looking at the boat. He could not see distinctly; the wind, charged with foam, drove in his eyes, and in the dancing water, the boat was as often hidden as seen.—'By gorra!' he exclaimed suddenly, 'it ain't Joe after all! Why—who in the world can it be? Dashed if it ain't a gal!' He drew his jersey sleeve across his eyes. 'Joe never can ha' gone and changed his sex. He can't have bided ashore and sent his sister. Of all unreliable creatures, there never was the likes of a boy. Here's a pretty go! Sending a gal out with the bread—and me a widower.' Then suddenly his heart stood still, and a feeling of sickness came over him. 'There can't have nothing happened to the little 'uns—and mother have sent!—not to baby!—and me knitting her socks.'

The lightship pitched and rolled; anchored as she was, she was subject to more violent and abrupt motions than if she had been free. Cable went on one knee and held his hand

over his eyes, to assist in taking a more steady observation.

'It ain't our boat,' he said. Then he shouted. The boat was now near. A girl was in it, rowing towards the vessel. She wore a glazed, black, sailor's hat; from under it her hair, long and dark, flew about in the wind.

'Come under the lee!' shouted Richard Cable. The girl slightly turned her head; as she did so the wind covered her face with her hair. She seemed all but completely exhausted. She pulled with long and laboured strokes.

'She's a young thing, and looks like a lady,' mused Cable. 'However she comes out here, it is not about the little 'uns. Mother is no fool.'

The girl, perhaps dazed with the hair and salt water in her eyes, and overcome with exhaustion, let go one oar to raise her hand and brush the hair from her face. The boat swung about at once.

'Hold hard!' shouted Cable. 'Don't lose heart. Here's a rope-end.' He caught up and cast a rope to her with such true aim that it fell athwart the boat; and the girl seized it with both hands, and in so doing let go the other oar, which was at once carried off by the sea.

'She's lost her head,' said Richard. 'It's lucky she didn't do it afore she came within reach.' Then he called to her: 'Make fast round the thwart, and I'll haul you in. Don't lose your head, whatever you do. Hold together, if but for a minute.'

The girl was staggering to her feet in the rolling boat.

'Keep hold of the rope!' he shouted. Then the boat touched the side of the lightship, which rolled at the moment. He caught the girl's hands, extended imploringly. The ship swung over, and he managed to raise the girl to the deck; but as she sprang from the boat, the spurn of her foot, or the recoil from the side of the vessel, sent her little boat adrift. The next moment it was swept away by the waves, whither Cable could not see—he had not the time to look; the condition of the girl he had saved engrossed his attention.

She was tall; in dark-blue navy serge gown, with a leather belt round her waist. She could not speak. Her breast was heaving; her breath came short and fast. Her cheeks were on fire, but her eyes were dim. Her consciousness was deserting her.

'You're pretty nigh done,' said Cable; 'let me fetch you a drop of brandy, miss.'

She put out her hand to arrest him, and

held to the bulwark with the other. She could not keep her feet. The motion of the vessel was irregular. It rolled, and was brought up with a jerk.

'I see,' said he; 'you must not be left alone. Drat it!—that's a souser!' as a wave went over the deck, covering him and the girl with a drench of spray. 'Come down with me —or, stay! let me carry you into the cabin.'

She offered no resistance, so he caught her in his arms and took her to the ladder. Her heart, under his hand, was fluttering like a butterfly at a window. Her breath came in sobs. He bore her to the ladder with long strides and descended with her to the outer cabin; this was where the coals were stowed and the oil stored; where he cleaned and trimmed the lamps. Beyond was a low doorway, that led into the main cabin, which in shape and relative proportions was like the toe-half of a boot. At the narrow end was the fireplace or stove; round the sides were lockers for the stowing away of sundries of every kind. The tops of the lockers served as seats. There was no table. On each side of the cabin was an aperture about two feet square, closed at pleasure with a sliding panel; this gave access to the bunk or sleeping-berth. By crawling in at the hole one found a mat-

tress, and space, but only just space enough to lie down, with the nose six inches from the nether surface of the deck. The smallest trifle in the cabin had its proper place, and everything was beautifully clean and orderly.

'There, miss,' Cable said. 'I doubt you won't be able to stow yourself properly into one of these here bunks without knocking yourself about; and if I was to put you on the locker, with the lurching you might slide off; so you had better just lie down on the cabin floor, with your feet to the fire. I'll spread a mattress for you. Lie down till you've got your breath again, and recovered from your fright a bit. You'd better presently, when you can manage it, whip off that gown, which is wet, and let me cover you up with blankets and give you a drop of hot brandy and water. Then try to get to sleep. Don't you mind me, miss. I'm the father of a family. I'm the father of seven little girls, and two of them twins. When you're able to look about you, miss, you'll see a pair of socks I've been knitting for the baby. I've one done, and t' other's getting on. Excuse the liberty if I throw my pilot coat over you —your gown was wet by that wave, and you seem so exhausted you might get your death of a chill. I've got to go aloft after the light,

which will occupy me some time. Then you can take off your gown. The darned boy has gorged all the bread, and there was none left; and I sent him ashore for more, and he hasn't come back, or he would act as your lady's-maid. Very sorry, miss, I can't do better; but don't think anything of me. I'm the father of seven children, and there's ne'er a boy among them, and two of them are twins, so there's no occasion to be afraid of me.'

He did not like to leave her in her condition of exhaustion, so he made an excuse to remain till he saw her a little recovered. He put the kettle on the stove. 'We'll have the water boiling directly. It don't mix well with the brandy if it isn't boiling.' Then he lit the pendent lamp, for the cabin was dark, and poked the fire, and coaxed the kettle, and groped for the sugar. When he had mixed her a glass, he brought it to her where she lay. The light of the lamp was on her face. 'Why—I declare, miss!' he exclaimed, 'why —surely, you're Miss Josephine Cornellis.'

She slightly nodded.

'Lord! Whatever brought you here?' he asked.

'I was running away.'

'From what?'

'My own thoughts.'

CHAPTER II.

JOSEPHINE.

THE storm increased to fury as darkness fell. Richard Cable stood on deck. To the south-west was no light whatever, only purple blackness. To the north, however, was a coppery streak, over which hung a whirling, spreading mass of angry vapour, casting down lines of heavy rain in dense bands. Then rapidly the growing darkness wiped out this band of light, and left only the east clear, and the clouds swept overhead like curling waves, and fell beyond, cutting off all sunlight there also, till on all sides nothing was visible but leaping water and shaken foam-heads; and above, a wild hunt of tearing, galloping clouds, lashed by the wind, with now and then a blinding streak of lightning shot through them, stinging them to fresh paroxysms of flying terror. Richard Cable had ascended to the masthead and kindled the light. The mast was but low, perhaps fifteen feet above

the deck, topped with a huge glass globe, that contained a powerful swinging light.

As Cable clung to the mast, he and it and the light swung, and the light described arcs and curves in the sky, against the driving smoky clouds and the gathering night. Now and again a great wave leaped up, and the swaying lamp irradiated its crest, and glared a glittering eye at it, that was reflected by the angry water, which rushed away under the keel, and threw it aloft, as if diving to get away from the blazing eye. The ship reeled and almost plunged its fire-point in the water; it tantalised the waves with it; it heeled almost to overbalance, and held the light above some hissing, hungry wave, which gathered itself together, rose at it to snap, and suddenly, with a whish and a streak of fiery ribbon, away went the luminous globe, and the wave roared and tore itself to ragged foam in rage at being balked. Then a gull hovered in the radiancy of the lamp, beating its long white wings about it, coming out of the darkness and spray-dust that filled the air, and disappearing back into it again, as man comes out of the Unknown, flickers a little span in the light of Life, and dives back into the Unknown. The wind had shifted several points, but it was hard for Cable to make out

from whence it blew; the lightship was anchored, and swung about her anchor, seemingly describing circles, pitching, tossing, heading at the wind, running before it, brought up with a jerk, lurching sullenly at it. She was moored to a couple of anchors, one of them a 'mushroom' (so called from its shape), for greater security against dragging, and Cable had paid out more chain to each. In such a gale, with such rollers, she must be given room to battle with the sea. Cable was by no means satisfied that she could hold where she was. The bank to which she was anchored was a shifting bank, formed by the swirl of the water round the ness; a treacherous bank, that formed and reformed, that was now a strip, then a disc, that eased this way and that, according to the drift of the sea at equinoctial gales. He looked landwards, but saw nothing, no blink of light from behind the willows, where lay Hanford; and outside Hanford, near the beach, a little white cottage with green windows, and under its brown tile roof seven little fair heads on white pillows.

As he stood looking through the darkness in the direction of the sleeping heads, he was startled by a voice at his elbow.

'Captain, is the worst over?'

'Miss! You should not be here.'

'I cannot help myself; I was suffocating below. I fancied we must part our anchor. I have plenty of pluck. My strength, not my courage, failed me in the boat. I lost my head because I was losing consciousness. I am well again. Is the gale spent?'

There was a lull in the wind, though the waves were still running. 'You must go below—you must, indeed,' said Cable. 'No; the gale is not over; it goes as a teetotum spins, and we're now at the peg. Wait, and it will be on us harder than ever again.'

'Can I be of any assistance?'

'You!' Cable laughed. 'Yes, go down below and be ballast.'

The girl was in his pilot coat, which he had thrown over her on the floor. She wore his glazed hat. The hair that had been dispersed was gathered in a knot again.

'If we are likely to drown,' she said, 'I will not drown in the hold, like a mouse in a cage.'

'Go down at once, whilst you may. You will be swept overboard if you stay here.'

'I will not,' she answered. 'Lash me to the mast, and let me look death and storm in the face.'

Cable saw that it was in vain to argue

with her. There was no time to be lost; he heard the roar of the gale again approaching.

'Here!' she said; 'this is my leather strap. Pass it round the mast and my waist. It is long and it is strong. Quick!'

He obeyed with a growl: 'Girls are as darned unruly as boys.'

The storm was on them again. It had paused to gather strength, and then rush in concentrated fury and accumulated force to destroy the defiant little lightship, that tossed its glittering head so dauntlessly, even defiantly, in its teeth.

They could hear it coming far away, in a roar that waxed in volume, and seemed like an enveloping thunder when it smote them with foam and a blast that struck like an open hand. But the wind was not one-handed, but as a Briareus, many-armed, tearing while it bellowed at what it could not beat down. At the stress of the blow, one of the cables gave way, a link having snapped somewhere under water. Then the main anchor, the chain having got foul of it, began to drag, and at once the lightship was adrift, at the mercy of wind and sea, swept before the hurricane. From force of habit Cable flew to the helm, but as quickly dropped it

again. He was helpless. The dragging of the anchor kept the vessel's head to wind, which was so far in their favour, and also steadied her to some extent. Now and then the anchor caught for a moment, and then let go again, and the ship was driven farther out, always heading to the wind, like a living being forced to retreat, but reluctant to yield an inch to the infuriated assailants.

Cable looked at the girl, on whom the flicker of the lamp fell; she did not cry, or, if she did, he did not hear her. She was fast bound by the belt, and stood, apparently, as firm as the mast to which she was strapped. Cable folded his arms. He could do nothing. He thought of his little ones. Had they prayed that night, before going to rest, for their father? Never had he more needed their prayers. He thought he knew the danger that threatened; but he did not. He saw indeed that shipwreck was imminent; but he little imagined that another and very different shipwreck menaced him. How old were the seven daughters of Richard Cable? The eldest was just thirteen; then came the twins of eleven; then a child of ten; and the pan-pipe descended in a regular fall to the baby, aged a year. They had come so fast as to exhaust the strength of the mother,

who had died shortly after giving life to the youngest.

Richard Cable raised his eyes, half-blind with salt, and, through the film of brine, looked at the swaying lamp, that seemed to blaze with prismatic colours, and shoot forth rays and draw them in again, like a fiery porcupine. And then he thought no more of the light and the darkness in which it danced, and saw far away into dreamland. Then through the cold salt spray on his face, a warm sweat broke forth.

'Poor little ones!' he said; 'if I am taken, whatever will become of them!'

At that moment he heard the girl's voice: 'Mr. Cable! Loosen the band—my arms are frozen.'

Her voice jarred on him at that moment, he knew not why; but it called him back from the consideration of his children to thoughts about her. He went to her and did what she required. He didn't speak to her; and, when he had complied with her wishes, he went back to the place where he had stood before. He tried to think of his home, of his children, and could not; her face, her voice had distracted him, and disturbed the visions he tried to call up.

How much of the night passed thus he

did not know: he was roused by a grating sound that made itself felt in every fibre of his body. The ship was aground; she had struck, not on a rock, but on a sandbank. Cable stood for a moment motionless. Then a wave came, raised the bows, ran midships, then to the stern, and carried the vessel farther on the bank. Thereupon, Cable left his place and came to the mast. 'Miss Cornellis,' he said, 'we're aground. I believe my little ones' prayers have helped me to-night.' He laid his hand on the mast and grasped the thong that bound Josephine. 'Young lady,' he said, 'in ten minutes we shall know our fate.' He stood still, holding the thong. He said no more for full twenty minutes. The vessel lay over somewhat on one side, and the water she had shipped poured out of her lee scuppers.

'I can see the horizon on the south-south-west,' said the girl.

'Yes; the worst of the gale is over.'

The waves no longer washed the deck.

'The tide is ebbing,' said Cable. He unlashed Josephine. 'Danger is over. Turn in and sleep.'

'But you?'

'I stay on deck awhile, and then I shall coil up in the forecastle.'

'Good-night,' she said, and held out her hand.

'I wish you sleep,' he said in reply. 'Mind the knitting-pins and the little sock in the cabin. They may be on the floor—anywhere.'

Next morning Cable woke early. The sun was shining. He descended the ladder to the outer cabin. Almost at the same moment the girl threw open the door and stood in it. She wore her blue serge gown. Her hair was fairly smoothed, though she was unprovided with brushes, and the leather belt was about her waist. She laughed. Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes sparkled. 'Not in Davy Jones's locker, after all,' she said. 'I must run on deck and look around me.'

'And I, Miss Cornellis, will get the fire lighted, the kettle boiling, and some breakfast ready.'

Half an hour later both were together on deck. The vessel was not so much inclined that it was difficult to walk the deck. When she had struck the sand was in motion, and she had sunk almost upright in it. The morning was fresh, the sky clear, but for some lagging, white, fleecy clouds that flew high aloft after the storm. Except for the

roll of the sea and the foam-wreaths round the bank, every trace of the terrible hurricane was gone. That storm had been short and violent; it had spun its spiral course over land and sea, doing damage wherever it passed; it had strewn the Essex level land with up-turned elms; it had torn the leaves of the chestnuts to threads, and blackened the young beech as if a breath from a furnace had seared them. Here and there it had taken a rick and sifted it and scattered the straw over the adjoining fields. It had ripped roofs, and tossed the brown tiles about and heaped them like russet autumn leaves. At sea it had caught and foundered coal-barges from the North, and sunk fishing-smacks. It had torn great gaps in seawalls, like the bites made by children's teeth in rounds of bread and butter. It had twisted and turned about old sandbanks, had swept some away, and torn channels where had been no road. For some miles out to sea, for two or three days, there was neither crystalline purity nor amethyst blue in the water; it was cloudy and brown with the mud it had churned and that it held in suspension. Along the shore lay wreaths of foam, not white, but brown; not evanescent as a bubble, but drying into a crust.

The lightship lay far away from the zone of turbid sea, and the ocean about the bank in which she was wedged was deeply blue, full of laughter and shake of silver curl, as though bent on passing off its late fury-fit as an excusable frolic.

'Where are we?' asked Josephine.

'I fancy that I know,' answered Cable; 'but without a chart I cannot make you understand. Now here we must bide till we are taken off, and you may tell me what brought you to the lightship.'

'I was out rowing yesterday afternoon,' said the girl, 'and I was caught unawares, the storm came on so suddenly. I rowed against the wind till I could row no more, and I saw I could do nothing. I was being carried out to sea; and then I felt that my only chance was to reach your vessel.'

'That was wise of you. But your father should not have let you come out alone.'

'Oh, I go out, and go alone, when I choose.'

'But—if he had looked at the glass, he would have seen the fall.'

'I did not ask his leave. I went because I wanted fresh air, to blow the bad thoughts out of my head that troubled me.'

'Bad thoughts trouble you!' exclaimed

Cable, and looked steadily at her out of his crystalline blue eyes, clear and sparkling as the sea that surrounded them. 'I should not have supposed that possible. Where the head is that of an angel, one does not expect that it shall hold bad thoughts. No one looks for explosives in a porcelain vase.'

Josephine laughed a short impatient laugh, and tossed her chin. The elastic was tight; she put her finger under it; the skin was compressed and reddened by the band.

She was a handsome dark girl, with transparent olive skin, and large lustrous eyes like agates. The lashes were long; when she half-closed her lids they gave a languor to the orbs, dispelled at once when full lifted. Her cheek flushed not the rose pink, but the ripe hue of the apricot. She had very dark hair, a rounded chin, broad temples; was firmly built. To anyone experienced in detecting types, a tinge of Jewish blood would have been recognised in the features and hue.

'Well,' she said, and laughed again, 'the hurricane has blown my bad thoughts out of my head, as it has carried the down from the willow flowers and scattered them—heaven knows where. Woe be to him who picks them up!—they will detonate and injure his hands.'

'Were they so bad?'

'You said yourself—explosives.'

'Miss Cornellis, I made a clumsy comparison. If I may ask—What were these thoughts?'

She fidgeted with her feet and plucked at the elastic band. In her nervous confusion, she drew it out, let it slip, and the elastic snapped on her delicate skin so sharply as to make her cry out. Then she took off her hat, and holding her knees, swung the hat from her finger, and let the wind play with her hair, and unravel it, and scatter it and toss about the short growth over her brow.

'Were the thoughts like to explode?' asked Cable.

'The questions you put to me are not fair, captain,' said the girl. 'My thoughts are my own.'

'Not a bit, Miss Cornellis: you said yourself they were blown about for anyone to pick up.'

'Well—and I am too much indebted to you to wish you to gather them. They are dangerous. Hands off!' She hugged her knees, and played with the string of her cap, and looked at the plunging waves on the sand. Her brow darkened, and her eyes lost their sparkle. 'Captain, when shall we get home—I to my worries—you to your babes?'

Cable shook his head. 'We must wait. Ah, miss, patience is an article of which a good cargo is laid in, in a lightship. One consumes a lot of it in a fortnight—separated from all one loves at home, and with none to speak to but a lout of a boy with no more intelligence than a jelly-fish.'

'I should think it pleasant to live in a lightship. I could be well content to stay where I am now. If I go home, I shall get into troubles again.'

'But—what are your troubles?'

'I'm adrift,' said the girl. 'As I stood bound to the mast last night, and the wind and the waves carried the boat and me where they would, I thought it was a picture of myself morally. You have your seven little anchors holding you. I have nothing. You are tied by many little fibres to hearth and home. I have none of these fibres: if I have, they hold to nothing.'

She was still looking before her. She put the elastic band of her hat between her teeth, and bit and tore till it parted.

'There!' said Cable. 'Now, how are you to keep your hat on?'

She looked at the broken string. 'I did not know what I was about,' she said; 'I was thinking my thoughts again.'

'I see,' said Cable. 'These same thoughts are not wholesome: they hurt her who harbours them and those they concern.'

'Yes,' she said; 'they drive me mad. I do not know what to do, where to go. I care for no tie any more than that of my hat I have torn. I would tear any one of them that restrained me.'

'I do not understand you,' said the light-shipman, shaking his head. 'I've seven little girls at home, and I'd be sorry to think any one of them should grow up with such thoughts as you have in your head.'

'They will not. Do not be afraid. They will always look up to and respect you. Did you not see how the lantern swung at the masthead all through the storm? It never went out; it burned all night; no wave engulphed it. We could always look up to that. You are the light to the little vessel of your family, and your children will look up to that.'

'And you, my dear young lady?'

'I—I have no light above me.'

'And what about helm and helmsman, compass, chart, Miss Cornellis?'

'I have nothing, neither helm nor helmsman, nor compass, chart, nor anchor, nor light. I am—drifting—a derelict.'

CHAPTER III.

A SEA-NETTLE.

CABLE went about his work as usual. He would not have to relight the lamp, as the boat was not at the station, but a castaway; however, he cleaned the lamp as usual and put the burners in order. Then he went into the cabin to clear away the breakfast and make all tidy, after the night. It had not occurred to Josephine to do anything. She was not accustomed to put her hand to menial work; she expected to be waited upon.

She half sat, half lay on the side of the vessel that leaned over, nearest the water, listening to the pleasant lap of the waves, with the glitter on her face from the sun reflected in the glassy water. She amused herself with watching the foam bubbles dance along, with wondering what the dark things were beneath the green surface that drifted by. Then she looked up and let the hot sun burn her face; she shut her eyes, and basked, or opened them

to see the gulls and kittiwakes hover and dart above. Then she put both her hands about her eyes, and tried to distinguish whether that faint white patch far away in the blue were the moon or a ghostly cloud. The tide had risen, and occasionally the waves came up so high that her hand over the side dipped in the water, and she sought to catch the weeds that were floating on it. With her fingers hanging over the bulwarks, with salt drops falling from them, she sang the Mermaid's air in *Oberon*:

> O wie wogt es sich schön auf der Fluth
> Wenn die müde Welle im Schlummer ruht!

She was happy, doing nothing, inhaling the fresh sea air, basking in the bright sun.

Josephine Cornellis was the daughter of a gentleman of some independent means, who lived in a villa or cottage near the sea at Hanford. The house was not beautiful, built of white brick, and square, but it was comfortable. It had a glass conservatory to the south before the drawing-room windows; and a pretty garden, inclosed within tarred wooden boards, that went down to the seawall. Mr. Cornellis lived in Rose Cottage with his unmarried sister and his daughter. He was a man of whose antecedents little was known.

He had bought Rose Cottage some seven or eight years ago, and had come there with his sick wife because the doctors ordered her sea air and the chlorine effluvium from the rotting seaweed. She had died there, a feeble, dispirited woman, whom few had got to know; and the husband remained on, as widower, with the little daughter, whom he allowed to go much her own way.

Mr. Cornellis was suspected of having Jewish blood in him; but no one knew anything about his ancestry. His true history was this. His great-grandfather, the first of the name, was an Austrian Jew, who came by his appellation in this way. The Emperor Joseph II. issued an order that all Jews in his dominions were to provide themselves with fixed surnames. Accordingly, the Hebrew Levis and Samuels and Isaacs chose for themselves the most flowery appellations they could invent, and became a mountain of Roses (Rosenberg), or a Valley of Lilies (Lilienthal), or affected heraldic distinctions, as Redshield (Rothschild), or Golden Star (Goldenstern), or simply Stag (Hirsch), or Lion (Löwe). But old Moses Israel had not a lively imagination nor much ambition, and when summoned before the magistrate to have his name registered, he was at a loss what to call himself. 'Come, old

skinflint,' said the official, taking the pen from his ear—'come—the name.'

'The name!' stammered Moses Israel.

'The surname. It must be entered on the protocol. I have no time to waste on you.'

'Surname!' repeated the Jew, and put up his hand to his head.

'I see,' said the magistrate, 'you have a cornelian ring on your forefinger. Cornelian shall be your name, *or*——'

'*Or!*' Moses Israel accepted the appellation given him from his ring rather than risk the alternative. Austrian officials did not make many bones of a Jew in those days. So the son of Moses Israel called himself after his father, Levi Carneols, but came to England, where he softened the Carneols into Cornellis. He married an Englishwoman, and professed Christianity. The great-grandson of old Moses Israel was Justin Cornellis. As his father was not well off, and he was obliged to do something for a livelihood, and as he had no love of hard work, he attached himself to a missionary society, and was sent about Asia and Northern Africa in quest of the Lost Tribes. He drew three hundred a year from this society, and rambled about, sending home occasional reports, pure fabrications, based on absolutely

no facts, spiced with appeals to fanaticism and piety. This lasted till somewhere in the Levant he caught the affections of a young English lady, the daughter of a merchant, and eloped with her, got married, and then threw up his position as missionary to the Lost Tribes.

The relations of his wife were very angry at the marriage, and Cornellis did not get with her as much money as he had calculated on securing. Nevertheless, he got something —her mother's portion; and with her and her income, he settled in England, where he did his best to dissipate her fortune on his own selfish pleasures. He neglected his wife, and spent much of his time in town. She became a mother, and then her health gave way. She had not the spirit to bear up against her disappointments. She had idealised the earnest, handsome missionary; and when she found him a sceptical, selfish man, her disappointment crushed her spirit. She lived on several years, till her daughter Josephine was about twelve, and then died.

Mr. Cornellis was a man who knew human nature, or prided himself on knowing it; but he knew only its weaknesses. He held mankind in contempt, as something to be preyed on by the man who had intelligence.

Associated with such a father, void of

principle, it may be understood how Josephine could speak of herself as a derelict, without anchor, light, or chart. She was a girl with natural warmth of character and generous feelings; but they were blighted by the cold sarcastic breath of her father's spirit, a spirit that sneered at kindliness, yet affected it in public; that made a mock of enthusiasm, yet pretended to it when likely to be profitable.

For some time Mr. Cornellis had cut himself completely adrift from all his old associates; but as his means became reduced, he began again to court them, and resumed his cloak of piety and benevolence, as occasion served, much as an actor would put on his costume for the part he was prepared to represent.

There are hypocrites of all sorts in the world; the most common kind is that which deceives itself. Those who belong to this breed are unconscious hypocrites, and no one would be more surprised than themselves to be stripped of their masquerade. But Mr. Cornellis knew perfectly what he was about. He wanted something of à certain class of men, and he dressed his window to catch them. At home he made no pretence to believe in the goodness of the articles exposed; he scoffed at the fools who were caught by them.

Josephine respected her father for his ability, but could not love him. He showed her little affection; he ridiculed all exhibition of feeling.

Her aunt was not an interesting woman. She was a butt for her brother's jokes. A woman with a mind essentially commonplace, without taste, refinement, and ability. She was stout and plain. There was in her, however, a certain amount of honesty and kindliness. Josephine despised Aunt Judith because she was stupid. There was no one about her whom she could love.

Richard Cable came up, took a bucket, turned it over, and seated himself on it, with his knitting, near Josephine.

'I have been watching a violet-coloured jelly-fish,' she said languidly. 'It opens and shuts like a parasol, and so works its way along; but how it can think to do this perplexes me, as it has no brains.'

'There are certain to be jelly-fish where the water is shallow and warm.'

'What an ideally perfect life they lead, floating when the sun shines, sinking when storm threatens.'

'But, Miss Cornellis, it is not a good life at all for such as us—we must always keep up, never sink.'

'And, to drift with the tide,' she said.

'This makes the difference between us and jelly-fish,' said the sailor. 'They go with the current, and we swim against the tide. God has withdrawn brain from the creature because it does not deserve one, floating as it does with the tide. Brain is needed only for those whose life is made up of effort.'

'Yes,' she answered, and laughed: 'I suppose it is so. And yet, there is a luxury in having the consciousness of brain power in one, and yet—swimming with the tide.'

'That is not a luxury—it is a treason,' said Cable. 'Would you be a jelly-fish, Miss Cornellis? Then choose only lukewarm and shallow water as your element.' There was a tone of reproach in his voice.

She was displeased at it, and pouted.

'Would you like a net, miss, and try to catch prawns?' he asked after a pause.

'No. I want to be a jelly-fish for the nonce—do nothing, think of nothing, but enjoy the sun and the glitter of the water.'

Again a silence of some duration.

'Did you chance to see my mother and any of my little ones about, before you left Hanford?' asked Cable. 'Excuse my asking; but I have not seen them for ten days.'

'No,' answered Josephine. 'I don't know them by sight.'

'There are seven,' said Cable.

'So I have heard.—You have lost your wife?'

'Yes. Poor Polly died ten months ago.'

'Tell me something about the children,' said Josephine. She lacked sympathy to hear concerning them. She spoke carelessly. She was vexed in her idle mood at being disturbed. She was in no way interested in the children; if they had been drowned, she would not have cared.

'It's a funny thing for a man to do, to knit,' she said sleepily.

'I knit for my babe; and I knit the love of my heart in and out with the wool, to keep the dear little feet warm.'

'I suppose you are fond of it.—I hate babies.'

Cable said nothing. He looked at Josephine's handsome face and wondered. He knitted a round, thinking, and then he said: 'Some day you may have babes of your own, and then you would like them to have a thousand feet, and to clothe all the little feet in socks knitted out of your heart-strings. You would give them everything you had; you would love them so dearly.'

'I cannot understand you. Are you talking Chinese?'

'No—the language of nature.'

'Yes; I suppose it is so. Cats and dogs, and I have no doubt also jelly-fish, love their young. As the brain gains, there is less of this animal affection. My father is a very clever man. He does not care much for me. You see, I am of no use to him.'

'He not care for you!'

'Oh, he *cares* for me, because he has the trusteeship of my mother's little fortune. You must see, Mr. Cable, disinterested affection is, and must be, irrational. That, I should think, was obvious to the meanest capacity.'

Cable continued his knitting. Her words troubled him, and his hand was unsteady; he dropped a stitch.

Josephine had her eyes half-closed, watching him, and a smile twinkled on her lips. She was amused at him, he was so simple. He loved his children, he had little brain. Then she laughed out.

Cable raised his bright blue eyes and met hers. He did not speak; but he questioned the occasion of her laugh with them. He had a suspicion that she laughed at him.

'I only want one thing to make me quite

happy,' she said. 'I was thinking of some chocolate creams I left on my dressing-table. Do you know that when I have been missed, Aunt Judith will eat my chocolate creams, and so console herself for my being drowned? —What is there for dinner to day?'

'Salt pork. I have nothing else.'

'It is well Aunt Judith is not here. She would be more troubled at having salt pork, than at being cast away on a sandbank.'

'You do not speak respectfully of your aunt.'

'I do not respect her.'

'I wish, miss,' said Cable, 'you would promise me, when you are on shore, that you would look at my little ones.'

'Oh, yes; I will carry them bonbons; but I give you fair warning that I shall not fall in love with them.'

Richard Cable's brow was troubled, and his hands would not make the stitches right. He laid the little sock aside, and folded his rough brown hands round his knee. He was a man who thought a good deal. Isolated from all companions for every alternate fortnight, except only from the tiresome, stupid boy, who was no associate, he lived much in his own thoughts. In the lightship he had time on his hands, time in which to think; and

perhaps the nature of his occupation, perhaps natural proclivity, had made of him a man who lived an inner life, a quiet, serene-souled man, who had never known a greater trouble than the death of Polly, his young wife, whom he had married when she was eighteen, and he hardly one-and-twenty. At seaside places, where there is much fishing, the men marry early. He had loved his Polly warmly, placidly, not passionately. There had been no cross-currents in his courting; all had gone smoothly to marriage; and since marriage, the course had also been smooth till the great breakdown ten months ago. He was a God-fearing man, with a simple, childlike trust and faith; and he was a kindly man to all around him. Though he swore at and grumbled about the boy Joe who was associated with him, he was considerate of him, and gentle with him, sparing him hard work, and careful to speak no unseemly word before him. Joe looked up to him as a dog to its master, with a hearty devotion; and his parents were inclined to joke him about his references to Master Cable's opinions, as though they were infallible.

When Richard's fortnight was out, and he came back to Hanford, no man could be happier than he, as he sat with the baby on

his knee, and put his rough finger into its mouth and let it try its new tooth on it; with the six other little girls round him, all fair-haired, with clear complexions and blue eyes. But though he dearly loved them all, and made most fuss with the baby, the eldest, Mary, sat nearest his heart. She was called after his dead wife; and there was a look about her eyes and something in all the upper part of her face that made him think of Polly. He took her to walk with him, but did not speak much. He was a silent man, thinking his own thoughts. These thoughts were of a simple order, and the revolution in his brain was by no means eccentric; but now he was brought in contact with a young girl who belonged not only to a different social sphere, but to a distinct moral and mental order; and against his will, she exerted a powerful disturbing influence on his mind. He did not understand her; he was uncertain whether she spoke out the real feeling of her heart; or whether she dissembled with him, and affected a callousness which she did not actually feel. He looked long and steadily at her, trying to read her character. She felt his eyes on her, and every now and then half-opened her lids and looked at him in reply to his gaze; then he started and turned his head

away with a sensation as if he had received a shot.

'How long is it since your father died?' asked Josephine, sitting up and putting on her hat.

He paused a while to gather his thoughts before he replied, then he said quietly, gravely, without a muscle changing in his face: 'I have lost him since I was an infant. I do not remember him.'

'What did he die of? Was he drowned at sea?'

'I do not know that he is dead.'

'Not dead!' She opened her beautiful brown eyes in surprise. 'Where is he, then?'

'I do not know.'

'How droll! Why does he not live with your mother and you?'

He paused again—a dark colour mantled his brow and temples. 'He deserted my mother.'

'And you have never been after him?'

'No.' He moved uneasily.

'Nor would I—unless he had money.'

Cable stood up and paced the deck with his head down. He raised it now and then and looked over the sea to the horizon. He was wishing that a sail was visible. He

became uneasy at being cast away on a sand-bank with this girl. Her presence disturbed the equanimity of his mind. He was attracted by her, yet she repelled him. He pitied her yet he feared her.

Presently he came up to her, and she raised her brown eyes to him to ask what he wanted. He bent his away. 'Look into the water,' he said a little roughly.

'The water is falling; I can see through to the sand.'

'Do you see yonder yellow mass floating by?'

'Yes—like a ghostly sponge.'

'Do you know what it is?'

'A sort of jelly-fish.'

'It is a sea-nettle.'

'A plant?'

'No; a living being. If you were to touch it, it would sting you, perhaps paralyse you. I have known bathers in deep water who have encountered one of these harmless-looking creatures, and the touch has deadened their nerves, so that they have sunk as lead and never came up again alive.'

'It is a pretty thing, too, with its long filaments. You hinted that there were human beings like jelly-fish.'

'There are. What I say, I think. And

there are human beings, even beautiful young girls, like sea-nettles. The jelly-fish have no heads; they do not hurt. The sea-nettles have no hearts; they sting and kill.'

'And I!' laughed Josephine, 'I am one of the latter! You are not complimentary. I have not hurt you—at least I have had no intention of doing so.'

'The sea-nettle has no thought of hurting the bather; its touch palsies without its having spiteful purpose, simply because it don't consider the feelings of those it encounters.'

Her face became grave, and she turned it abruptly away towards the sea.

He continued his walk. Then he went into the cabin and fetched his telescope. He looked intently in one direction; Josephine looked over the bulwarks in another; he at the far off, she at the near—the ebbing tide and the drifting weed and living creatures in the shallows. Then he came across to her. 'I am sorry I spoke rudely,' he said.

She turned her face. There were tears in her eyes, perhaps of mortified vanity. She put out her hand to him. 'Do not be afraid to touch me,' she said with a forced laugh; 'I will not hurt you. I would not do so for a great deal. I dare say I am hard. I am unhappy. I trust no one; believe in nothing;

have no love, no hope. I will not sting. Tell me the truth always, however unpalatable. I hate lies.'

Then he stooped and touched the tips of her fingers with his lips. 'I pity you infinitely,' he said. 'You must find some one or something to love, or you will be lost.'

His voice was so kind, his manner so deferential, such genuine, hearty compassion streamed out of his honest eyes, that she was softened. 'I will come and see you sometimes,' she said; 'I will see your mother and the children. I will try to get interested in them, and get out of myself, and away from the hateful atmosphere that surrounds me at home.' Then she laughed. 'Mr. Cable, throw me a rope now and then, and haul me out of the shallow water in which I live, and where I shall become a sea-nettle.'

'With God's help, I will do what I can,' he said gravely, and put his hand to his cap, as offering a salute.

CHAPTER IV.

ROSE COTTAGE.

Mr. Cornellis was standing at the window of his drawing-room, looking out into the conservatory, with his hands in his pockets. He was a dark, handsome man, with brown eyes, like those of his daughter, but harder: polished pebbles without any softness in them. He wore a moustache, no beard or whisker; he affected nothing clerical in his dress, but he wore black, chiefly because he thought it suited him. He was particular about his clothes, always was neat, and with fresh white, starched cuffs and collar and shirt-front; and his cloth suit fitted him admirably. One might have supposed that, with his rambling life in the East, he would have contracted untidy, careless habits; but this was not the case; he affected to be a well-dressed man. He knew how important it is for a man in Europe to maintain a good exterior, if he is to

command the respect of men. No one will believe that the moral character is out at elbows, when the cloth coat is without creases; and everyone mistrusts the uprightness of the man whose trousers bulge at the knees. Why not? Is not a dog with a patchy back out of sorts? and a moulting fowl an unprofitable creature? How are we to judge except by the exterior? There are telescopes constructed by which we can peer under water, and see what lies far down in the deeps; but we have no such apparatus for thrusting down men's throats and prying into the abysses of their hearts. Besides, if we had them, our fellows would decline to allow us to use them. There are stethoscopes by which the doctor can hear the inhalations of our lungs, the inflation of its vessels, and can detect which are sound and which carious; but there are no spiritual stethoscopes which we can apply to our neighbours' temples, and hear through them the operation of the brain, and distinguish base from healthy thoughts there. I maintain that we are justified in judging of a man by his coat and continuations, by his hat and gloves and his boots; for there is congruity in all creatures, and the exterior does almost invariably correspond with the interior. The face is the index of the mind,

and the gloves of the soul. Who does not know that the pair of lavenders with the fingers showing at the ends indicates radical shabbiness through all the integuments of the character? and the dirty left-hand and clean right-hand dogskin an ill-balanced spirit?

Mr. Cornellis was piping low to himself between his very white front teeth, which were just so far apart as to allow the breath to hiss or whistle between them. It was unusual with him to have his hands in his pockets; that was a luxury in which he indulged himself only at home. Abroad, he played with his gold watchchain, curling it round his forefinger. He was now looking at a Maréchal Niel rose that hung its drops of yellow flowers from the roof; the sun streamed in through its pale green leaves upon the beautiful blossoms. Then Mr. Cornellis opened the French window and went into the conservatory, and still hissing, plucked off the withered blooms, which he put in a basket kept for the purpose. He was tidy in that also. Then he pulled up a weed he saw in an azalea pot; then opened his penknife with a threepenny bit, lest he should break his nail, and carefully cut a charming bud off the creeping rose. He came back into the parlour, laid the flower on the table, and said: 'Put it in water, Judith.'

'For myself?' asked Miss Cornellis, who was lounging with her back to the window in an arm-chair.

'For Gabriel,' answered Mr. Cornellis.

'You never give me anything, Justin.'

'Because you take what you want, Judith.

'I really cannot think how you can have the heart to be squashing aphis and picking roses——'

'I am not, and I have not been, what you call squashing aphis. If I want to kill the aphis, I use an insecticide or brushes.'

'I don't care how you do it,' said Miss Cornellis. 'It is heartless of you, whether done with your fingers, or with brushes or Ghishurst's Compound.—Poor Josephine! Who knows where she may be? Perhaps floating dead on the surface, perhaps sunk in the deeps.'

'Am not I her father?' said Mr. Cornellis sharply. 'Have I not the feelings proper to my position? Of course I am troubled and anxious; but I do not forestall evils. If the worst come to pass, her life is insured for a thousand pounds. You would not have me sit moistening handkerchiefs, at the prospect of an evil which may not have occurred.'

'Where is Josephine? She went out in the boat, and neither she nor the boat has

turned up since. I don't say that I expect you to blubber——'

'Merciful heavens? Judith, how coarse you are. I said moisten, and that word is expressive enough. It is a mark of bad breeding to use exaggerated terms.'

'Justin, I don't care twopence about the word; it is the thing concerns me. You don't seem to half feel Josephine's disappearance, and then—to talk in that cold-blooded way of having insured her life!'

'I did insure her, two years ago; and if she be lost, I shall claim the money.'

'I never doubted that,' said Judith. 'You will always view everything from a monetary point of sight, even your daughter's death.'

'My dear sister, one must live. I do not wear my heart exposed to all the world, trailed to the light, spread out, tied to wires, and call everyone to admire its tears, like the blossoms of a Maréchal Niel. What are you about now with your back to the light?'

'I—— Nothing, Justin.'

'I am positive you are doing something that affects your speech.'

His sister hesitated a moment, and then said: 'I have been searching poor dear

Josephine's room, in hopes of finding some clue to her whereabouts.'

'And pray, do you suppose she has gone a cruise in her own bedroom, and has run aground on the firemat, or shipped a sea in the wash-hand basin?'

'I thought I might find some trace of where she had gone.'

'That is like your wisdom, Judith. Perhaps you suppose she had gone out meditating suicide, and had left a note to inform us of her intentions. You are hardly gifted with sufficient imagination to conceive of such nonsense as that. Well—what did you find?'

'Only a box of chocolate creams.'

'And you are munching them! Really Judith, you are heartless, not I.'

'There is no harm in eating chocolate creams.'

'None in the least, only—it is greedy to munch when you should suck.—Hand the box to me.'

Mr. Cornellis put a bonbon into his mouth. Were these two, the father and the aunt, unfeeling in consuming the contents of Josephine's box of chocolate, uncertain of the fate of the girl? We have no right to draw such a conclusion. Miss Cornellis looked at her brother, and thought him heartless because he sucked;

and Mr. Cornellis considered his sister callous because she chewed ; and we regard them both as lacking in proper feeling because they ate. Are we not as prejudiced, as unjust to both, as the one was to the other ? When we attend the funeral of a dear relative, do we not partake of the breakfast ? Do we not expect a well-spread table as the necessary concomitant to hearse and hatband ? Are we entirely indifferent to the quality of the sherry ? and whether we have the liver wing or the drumstick of the chicken handed to us ? and does not gall make itself felt in the chambers of the heart, if we are balked of one slice of tongue with the chicken ? The widow upstairs has her eyes red with tears, but is quite sensible whether there is sugar enough with the mint sauce with the lamb ; and afterwards, in the hush of the evening, when the masons have closed up the tomb about her darling, and the mourners are gone, she will speak to the cook in a broken voice full of suppressed tears, and bid her mind another time and stir the sugar in the saucedish before sending it in, and chop the mint a little finer. So also the widower, who, with manly self-constraint, has bottled up his tears and talked of the weather, thrusts the crust of his cold veal pie impatiently to the margin of his plate,

because the paste is not flaky, and curses his destiny because now he has no one to keep his cook up to the mark.

Then, why should we take offence at Mr. and Miss Cornellis consuming chocolate creams when they are not in the least certain that Josephine is dead? We are all humbugs and hypocrites, more or less; we draw a purely conventional line, and denounce every transgression of that line as evidence of inhumanity or want of taste; but within that arbitrary boundary we are Pharisees, thanking God we are not as other men are, who eat chocolate creams in times of family bereavement, but content ourselves with gooseberry pie and custard, and blanc-mange and cabinet-pudding.

'The lightship is lost,' said Mr. Cornellis, 'and that fellow Cable has gone to the bottom.'

'He leaves a large family.'

Mr. Cornellis shrugged his shoulders. 'They will wriggle on. I knew a collier once who drowned himself because he thought his family would be well cared for if he were away, judging by the prosperity of the widows and orphans of some of his mates.'

'No tidings whatever of Josephine's boat?'

'Not like to have them, with the gale off

shore. If washed up anywhere, it will be on the Dutch coast.'

'Do you really flatter yourself she is alive?'

'I will not believe otherwise till I am forced to it.'

'Gabriel is much fidgeted about her disappearance. He makes more ado than you. He has taken greater fancy to her than I thought possible, considering how she treats him.'

Judith had hardly said the words, before the door opened, and a man came in, a gentleman distinctly, but a feeble, mean creature, with a thin face, almost transparent nose, a low brow, and with faded, watery blue eyes. His face was pale, and the muscles twitched in it. The head shook on the neck with a nervous, convulsive tremor. The expression of his countenance was a curious mixture of conceit and appeal. He wore a bottle-green coat with velvet collar. As he entered, a smell of opium pervaded the room, and neutralised the fragrance of the tea-rose.

'O Mr. Gotham!' said Aunt Judith, 'we were just speaking of you.'

'Eh, eh! My left ear was burning. What was it? No good, no good, of course.'

'Certainly not, squire,' said Mr. Cornellis,

going up to him and clasping his hand with frank and almost boisterous geniality. 'My sister has been shaking her head over you, wondering whether you have sowed all your wild-oats yet; telling me what a scapegrace you are, what a roystering, dashing blade you are, and was asking me to deny you access to our house—and see! in you walk without ringing at the front door, or tapping here at the parlour entrance, just as if you were hail-fellow-well-met, and had the run of our house, and a right to the first place at our table. And, by George! squire, you are right; you are lord of the manor, and I have to do homage to you annually with a straw.'

Mr. Gotham's weak eyes twinkled, and a pink blush suffused his nose. He looked from one to another and giggled.

'Come here, squire,' said Mr. Cornellis, handing him an arm-chair. 'What sort of sport have you had with the harriers?'

'Not much. The last meet, killed two.'

'Any nasty jumps?'

'Two or three.'

'Glad to see you alive, squire.'

'I don't myself care for a hare-hunt,' said Mr. Gotham, letting himself stiffly and slowly down into the chair. 'We run in a circle,

you know. Nothing like a fox-hunt; but no more of that till next season.'

'Who were out?'

'I—I—I can hardly say. I wasn't there. I had my neuralgic pains again, and so, at the last moment, reconsidered my purpose. But I intended to go, I intended fully. I began to dress for it, and got on my boots; but the neuralgia took me when I stooped, and I was obliged to have recourse to my drops. So ——Judith, I frighten you, do I? No occasion for that. I am sadly changed, sadly—a poor broken being now.' He looked eagerly, questioningly from sister to brother, and back again.

'Broken fiddlesticks!' exclaimed Mr. Cornellis. 'Do you suppose, if Judith thought that, she would have been pulling a Maréchal Niel for your button-hole? Ladies don't lavish flowers on broken beings and weaklings, but on boisterous fox-hunters and jolly dogs. I know women's hearts; but Lord! so do you, you rascal!'

Mr. Gotham chuckled and blushed. 'There,' he said; 'I have come to hear about poor Josephine. I am so troubled. I could not sleep last night thinking about her. The anxiety brought on my neuralgia —all thinking and worry does—and I should

not have slept last night at all but for my drops.'

'It is really very kind of you, squire, to give her so much thought. We have been in sad distress, as you may judge. I am a father—her father; you must excuse me, Gabriel. I try to talk of other matters, but I can only think of my child; she is my own flesh and blood.'

Mr. Gotham began to fidget in his chair; he put up his hand to his brow, and said in a tremulous voice: 'Any news of the lightship? It is lost, I hear, and—I have not been particular in inquiries about it; I was afraid of seeming too particular.'

'None,' answered Mr. Cornellis with his hard eyes on the man.

He, feeble creature, looked at Miss Judith, then at her brother, as if he wanted to say more, but was afraid to commit himself.

'You need not hesitate,' said Mr. Cornellis. 'My sister knows all, and is close as the grave.'

'I am very uneasy, very unhappy. I—I do not know what I ought to do. I could not possibly—and yet—— You can hardly conceive how I have suffered, how the neuralgia has tortured me in consequence of—of—— You can understand me.'

'Let bygones be bygones,' said Mr. Cornellis. 'I knew an old bastion where the dead had been buried after a siege two hundred years ago. Lately, a speculative builder ran up houses over the site, disturbed the earth for his foundations and kitchens, and the first inmates of his new houses died of diphtheria. Never rake up old grave-ground, squire.'

'No. I suppose you are right.' Mr. Gotham stood up. 'But I should like to talk the matter over with you in my house, when the worst is known. I'm not happy. I feel the pains coming on again. I think I must go home.'

'Very well. I will come over. Take something at once to soothe your lacerated nerves?'

Mr. Gotham nodded.

'Do not forget your rose,' said Cornellis. 'My sister picked it expressly for you, but is too shy to offer it you with her own fair hands.'

'The rose will lose half its charm unless it be presented by her,' said Gotham with a bow; and when he had left the room, he sniggered. 'He, he! I can turn a pretty speech to a lady! I'm an old buck! Am I not, Justin?'

'Not old. Why, what are your years—forty-five?'

'Oh, more than that, alas!'

'You don't look it. But it is the hunting, the fresh air. The back of a horse makes you, as Polixenes says, to be boy eternal.'

'Yes. I subscribe very liberally to both the Foxhounds and the Harriers.'

'And you are out with them continually.'

'When I can. I have my horses and my hunting suit; but the neuralgia interferes terribly with my sports. You will come in—you will be sure to come in, after I have had some rest—say, in three hours. I am so uneasy. There is really nothing heard of the lightship?' He looked appealingly to Cornellis.

'Nothing. And believe me, Gabriel, it will be best for all if the blue sea covers him.'

Gotham's hand trembled in that of Cornellis. 'I—I do not know. I am in pain. I cannot bear my sufferings. I must go home. You will come to me?'

'You are overdone, squire, with the hunt.'

'I only intended to go.'

'But—the exertion, even of that! And the drawing on of the boots, to a man so

agonised with pain as yourself. Good heavens! the heroism, the self-mastery! What men there are in the world!'

He stood in his door, looking after the squire, who had not far to walk; his gate was within a stone's-throw of Rose Cottage.

Not a muscle in his face changed, to show in what way his thoughts turned. Then he went back to the sitting-room.

'Justin,' said his sister, 'I really think you might say a word to him. He is killing himself with opium.'

'My dear Judith, when you see a man on his way to the devil, let him alone. If you try to divert him, he will go another way; but the destination will be the same, and the blame of his going will attach to you.—Give me another of those chocolate creams.'

'You know best,' said Judith. 'You are very clever, and I am dull; but you might do something, I think.'

The door suddenly opened, and Josephine appeared in it, browned from exposure, her eyes dancing. 'I knew it, I knew it! I said as much to Richard Cable. Eating my chocolate creams!'

'Josephine!' Her father stepped forward; her aunt sprang up.

'Well, I knew aunt would be at them. I

did not think it of you, papa. Pah! how the room smells of opium. I know that cousin Gotham has been here.'

'I am very, very glad to see you again, Josephine,' said her father. 'Give me a kiss. Where have you been? What has happened?'

'I—I have been on the lightship with Dicky Cable.'

'He is not dead—not drowned?'

'No more than myself.'

Mr. Cornellis was silent; his brow contracted.

'Upon my word!' exclaimed Josephine, 'what ravages you two have made on my box of chocolate creams!'

CHAPTER V.

HANFORD HALL.

Mr. Gabriel Gotham lived in what was called Hanford Hall, but in Essex every farmhouse is a Hall. It was, however, the manor-house, and was the best house in the place—a long rambling building, plastered, and the windows painted Indian-red ; a house long and shallow. It was embowered in trees. The grounds were not extensive, but they were pretty. A steep slope to the sea, with noble elms on it; a set of terraces, where roses grew luxuriantly, and where, in summer, the beds of calceolaria and geranium made a gay contrast to the dense green of the trees and the sweeps of grass. Here and there on the terraces stood statues of plaster painted, somewhat spotted with black and green decay. The terraces were gravelled from the beach with grit that would not bind, and was carried about by the boots of him who walked on it over the grass and into the rooms. The entrance gates were

somewhat pretentious; the posts supported heraldic lions holding shields; but these also were of plaster, not stone, and were painted.

When the tide was in, the view from the terraces and from the windows of the house was very beautiful, through peeps among the elms to the sea, and across Hanford water to a coast beyond, also studded with trees. The water was generally enlivened by passing sails, as Hanford was a colony of fishermen, either owning their own boats or going shares as a company in one smack. Barges came to Hanford with coal from Yorkshire and Newcastle; and barges left Hanford piled up on deck with straw, veritable floating stacks, for London. 'At certain seasons, the sprat fishery supplied the farmers with unctuous dressing for their fields; at such times, clouds of gulls fluttered over the land thus manured, and unless the fish were quickly ploughed in, rapidly reduced the supply spread over the surface. At such times, the inhabitants of Hanford, gifted with the sense of smell, were heartily glad when the plough did turn the glebe over the dead fish; but there was a worse smell than that of sprats to which the Hanfordians were periodically subjected, and that was when a shipload arrived of what was locally termed 'London muck,' that is, the scrapings of the

London streets and the refuse of the London ashpits. When such a cargo arrived, it announced its presence to leeward for two or three miles; whereupon the farmers lifted up their noses, ordered out their wagons, and distributed the stench broadcast over the country. The gulls were unattracted by this dressing; consequently, the farmers were less precipitate in working it in.

At all times, daily, throughout the year, the noses of the Hanfordians were required to inhale the effluvium of decomposing weed when the tide went out, and so nature providently blunted the organ against offence through the periodical dressings of sprats and London muck. The smells, if not pleasant, were salubrious, according to the opinion of the inhabitants; and, to judge from their robust forms and florid complexions, these odours cannot have been nocuous.

The marshes, backwaters, and ditches bred countless mosquitoes, which lay in wait for strangers, whom they tortured to madness; but they did not touch natives. On a warm summer evening, the gnats might be seen hovering in clouds over the elms and oaks, so dense and so black, that the stranger supposed the trees were on fire and smoking. The mosquitoes brought birds, and the trees

resounded with the song of nightingale, thrush, and blackbird. In winter, the water was covered with gray geese and wild duck, and the shooting of these occupied the men, when nothing was to be got by the fishing.

What was it that made Mr. Gotham start and tremble and shrink back, as he passed through the side gate for foot-passengers into the grounds? Before him stood a woman, old, with gray hair, holding a baby in her arms, whilst two little children clung to her skirts. She was a fine woman, commanding, with bright eyes, and a strongly marked nose. She held herself very erect, and there were dignity and sternness in her manner and attitude as she confronted Gabriel Gotham. He, quivering and speechless, shrank from her, as trying to hide himself from her eye. He had occasion thus to cower before her; for if ever a despicable man had done a dastardly act, that man was Gotham, and the proud woman before him was the one he had wronged. Gabriel Gotham's father had been a solicitor at Newcastle; but his uncle, Jeremy Gotham, a successful merchant, had purchased the manor of Hanford and the Hall. Jeremy had lived there in his old age, and as he had no children of his own, invited his nephew, Gabriel, to stay with him; also his brother

and his sister-in-law occasionally. As a boy, Gabriel liked to be with his uncle; the old man made much of him, and was liberal in supplying him with pocket-money. He had a pony and a boat at Hanford, and was called by the hangers-on 'the young squire.' But Gabriel was a weak, lanky boy, badly put together, without colour in his cheeks, and with pale blue eyes and fair limp hair—not at all the ideal young squire that his uncle would have desired as his successor. He supposed that the boy had been overworked at school or overtasked in his father's office, and insisted that the sea-air of Hanford would set him up. He urged him to out-of-door pursuits, to ride with the hounds and to row. But Gabriel preferred to jog to the meet and then ride home; and if he went out in the boat, to sit in the stern with his hands in his pockets and let some one else row him.

Jeremy was very proud of his position as lord of the manor, and made himself disliked by exacting all kinds of rights which he believed to be his legally, but which had been ignored or encroached on by the fishermen of Hanford. By the shore was a piece of sandy ground overgrown with coarse turf, occasionally covered by tides of extraordinary height. On this the Hanfordian youth were accus-

tomed to play cricket. Jeremy Gotham laid claim to it; as lord of the manor it was his. If the young men ran over it, they would establish a precedent, and he would be unable to inclose and extend his grounds in that direction. Consequently, he railed it off. Thereupon the young men tore down his rails. He repalisaded the ground: it was again assailed. Then ensued a lawsuit, which he gained. But he had accumulated against himself so much ill-will that he was fain to accept a compromise, and allow the cricket club the use of the land for a small annual acknowledgment. Then, again, as lord of the manor he had heriot rights over two farms; and on the death of one of the farmers, he demanded the two best horses out of his stable. He had a right to the horses; but to exact his right was unwise, and brought on him bitter ill-will. There was a copious and unfailing spring in his stable-yard. The villagers were badly off for drinking-water, they were supplied with surface-water collected in tanks. This failed in dry summers, and they came with their cans and pails to his pump. He bore the inconvenience a little while; but when a farmer sent a barrel on a cart to be filled, he put a chain and padlock on the pump, and refused to remove it, and allow of

water being taken from his well except at an acknowledgment—every cottager to pay him a shilling per annum, and every farmer five.

The dislike felt for the retired merchant who had set up as squire extended to his nephew; and Gabriel was jeered at when he rode out, and had stones or mud thrown at him when he showed himself in the village street. He was conscious of his own deficiencies, because told of them by his uncle, and because they were flung contemptuously in his face by the village lads. At the same time, his position as heir to the estate and house made him proud, or rather—for there is dignity in pride—conceited. Thus he grew up a mixture of diffidence and vanity. At the lodge lived a woman who had been wife of the boatman of the former squire, a Cornish woman, named Cable. She was left with an only daughter. Her husband had been drowned one night going out in a punt after wild-fowl. Mr. Jeremy Gotham kept her as a lodge-keeper, and she did charing in the house. The daughter was two or three years older than Gabriel, a strong handsome girl, determined in character; and she constituted herself the protector of the young squire. When he had been assailed with stones or bad

words, he would tell her ; and if she knew the name of the offender, and he was of or near her age, she would chastise him with her fist or with a stick. She often rowed him out, when he had a fancy to be on the sea, and looked after him—that he had his greatcoat with him ; that he wore his muffler ; that he did not wet his feet, or, if they were wet, that he changed his socks as soon as he came home. This sort of intimacy had sprung up when they were children, and continued when they had grown up. No one thought seriously of it, as she was older than he, full of sense and strength of purpose ; and he, a weak, washed-out creature without manliness. Nevertheless, she became attached to him. She was one of those strong characters which do not look for a support, but to become a support, and find satisfaction in sustaining the feeble creeper that pulls itself aloft by its means. There were several young fishermen in Hanford who tried to get Bessie Cable to walk out of a Sunday with them ; but she gave encouragement to none, and finally left the place as servant to Mrs. Giles Gotham of Newcastle, who had taken a fancy to her when on a visit to her brother-in-law. Mrs. Giles could never get on with her servants, and laid all the blame on the Newcastle girls. If she could

induce a young woman to come to her from a distance, she would be sure of keeping her for a twelvemonth. Moreover, the mother of Bessie being in the service of the Gotham family, the daughter might be reckoned on to do her utmost to have the interest of the Gothams at heart. The handiness, the willingness, the robustness of Bessie, pleased Mrs. Giles; and so Bessie, whom her mother relinquished somewhat reluctantly, departed with her to Newcastle.

Gabriel remained with his uncle some time after his mother left. He was now a young man, who looked as if a good shake would shake him to pieces. His legs and arms hung too loosely to his trunk, his back was bent. He never, apparently, could get a tailor to master the conformation of his body and clothe him well. He maundered about, after Bessie was gone, much at a loss for a companion. He had clung to her and made an associate of her, had looked up to her and trusted her; and very forlorn he felt when deprived of her company and protection.

One day, a few months later, Mrs. Cable died suddenly of a stroke. The distance from Newcastle was too great for Bessie to come down to the funeral, and the poor woman left but a few trifles for Bessie to

inherit. These Gabriel undertook to have put away safely for her.

Before Christmas, Gabriel went home to Newcastle, taking with him such things of her mother's as Bessie wanted. His uncle was reluctant to let him depart, but could not dispute the right of his parents to reclaim him for a while. At Easter, Gabriel was to return to Hanford Hall. But at Easter, Gabriel did not appear; at midsummer, however, he did, looking the same—a limp creature without vigour of body or mind. What had happened in the interim between him and Bessie, his parents and uncle—only these interested parties—knew. What had occurred was this. On his return to Newcastle with plenty of money, which his uncle had given him, Gabriel was delighted to renew his friendship with Bessie. But circumstances were different. She was servant in his father's house, and that house was in the town. She had her duties, and could not row him on the sea or saunter with him in the garden. He found his way down into the kitchen, to complain to her about his mother's tyrannical ways; but Mrs. Giles came after him and pinned a dishclout to his coat, and warned him not to go below stairs again.

Gabriel was almost a stranger in Newcastle, and had no friends there of his own sex and age. He was not a man to make friends, except of boys and girls. He was not muscular enough to feel himself the equal of those of his own age; he could not cricket, or shoot, or play billiards. If he found a boy before whom he could swagger, he would take him up for a day or two and patronise him and give him tartlets; but boys speedily found him out, and despised him and deserted him; occasionally, he caught them caricaturing him. Girls did not pay him attention; they slighted him; only Bessie Cable stood by him, ready to fight his battles and hold him up, and be to him the tower of strength he needed. His father despised him; his mother bullied him; but Bessie loved him with infinite pity and disinterested fidelity. He was flattered and touched, and in his loneliness drew towards her the more because forbidden to associate with her.

One day, both had disappeared from Mr. Giles Gotham's house. Gabriel had persuaded Bessie to elope with him over the Scottish frontier and to be married. Married they were in Scotland; and from Scotland, Gabriel wrote to his father and his uncle announcing the step he had taken. He re-

ceived no answer from either. He remained in Scotland with his Bessie for some weeks, as long as his money lasted, the money wherewith he had been provided by his uncle; and when that was expended, he wrote for more. Then he heard from Mr. Jeremy Gotham. His uncle was furious. He would disinherit him, unless he at once separated from the low-born maid-of-all-work he had mated with, and whom Mr. Jeremy absolutely refused to acknowledge. Then, Gabriel wrote a penitent letter to his father. Mr. Giles came to Scotland, and discovered that the marriage could be invalidated. According to the Act of Parliament on the subject, one of the parties contracting a marriage in Scotland must have been resident there twenty-one days previous to the ceremony. Gabriel had not resided there with Bessie the full time: it was short by exactly five hours; therefore, the marriage could be upset. With Gabriel's consent, it was upset. He was in no position to earn a livelihood; he was destitute of private means; he listened to reason, as his father said, and deserted Bessie. Mr. Giles had the marriage cancelled; and when Bessie became a mother, her child was not qualified to bear his father's name.

Three years passed before she reappeared

in Hanford with her boy Richard. There she remained. Of her story, nothing was known: she never spoke of it. She had lost her character whilst in service, people said; but so had many another maid, and the particulars did not transpire. Gabriel was received again into favour by his uncle. He and Bessie never met again to speak; she avoided him, as he avoided her. In his base mind rankled a sense of degradation, of shame for his desertion of the faithful creature. Her pride sustained her. She could not forgive his treachery. So she lived by herself, and reared her son, and the son did not know who was his father.

No wonder that now, after a lapse of but a little short of forty years, Mr. Gabriel Gotham started and shrank from the woman he had wronged, when she broke through her reserve and came to meet him within his own gates.

CHAPTER VI.

BESSIE.

'WHAT—what has brought you here?' asked Mr. Gabriel in a trembling voice. He had a walking-stick, and he held it horizontally with both hands, one at the ferrule, the other at the handle, and thrust it before him, as making a barrier between himself and the woman.

'Not myself—my wants and my wrongs,' she answered sternly. 'For myself I ask nothing but to be left to myself; I have no wants. My wrongs are buried in my heart, known to none but you; no—not even to my son—to your son. He has never learnt who was his father. I should cover my face with shame, were it known.'

'Then, what—what do you want, Bessie?'

'I say, I want nothing for myself. I have come here not for myself. God forbid! I would not receive anything of you for myself. No—if I were drowning as my

father drowned, and as my poor son has drowned, and you held out a hand, I would clench my fist and smite it away, and sink, rather than owe my life to you.'

'Then—what is it?' asked Mr. Gotham, with his knees quaking under him. 'You agitate me.'

'No wonder that I agitate you. The wonder to me is that the agitation has not become a Saint Vitus's dance that never leaves you. God forgive me! I loved you once. I could tear my flesh off my hand with my teeth now—after these many years—at the thought that it ever held yours. I loved you!' She reared her proud form; in spite of age, it was full of nobility and reminiscence of grace and beauty. 'I loved you!' She looked at him with scorn. 'I ask myself, whenever I see you pass along the road, what could I find in you to love?'

'I was rich,' said Gotham; and as he spoke, he raised his stick level with his face, as if to ward off the blow that he deserved for the sneer.

'You coward!' cried Bessie. 'How dare you hint at that! As if I cared for anything but you. And you I cared for only because I was your help and support, your nurse

almost; I cared for you because you were laughed at, cold-shouldered, delicate, helpless, and clung to me as this babe now clings to my bosom.'

'It is of no use, Bessie,' said Gabriel, with quavering voice—'it is of no use raking up old graves—that is what Mr. Cornellis has just said.'

'It is of use,' answered the woman, 'when the bones do not lie in holy ground. The ghost will walk and flap its winding-sheet and scream in the black, still night, and you must see it and hear it. I—I have not spoken out my heart all these weary years. I have seen you, and you have seen me, but we have not spoken. I, sitting on the hard bench in the aisle, have looked to the squire's pew in the chancel, and watched you there during service. Once, when my seat was taken, I came over and occupied a bench outside your pew, and leaned back with my ear to the board, and heard your shaky pipe whine: "We have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and we have done those things we ought not to have done, and there is no health in us." Did you feel the pew shake, that Sunday morning, Gabriel? I was not crying; I trembled with rage, and the pew trembled with me. Then you stood up and looked

over; and when you saw me there outside, sitting and lying back with my eyes raised, you thought you saw a ghost, and sank again to your knees. For all these many years we have been no nearer each other than on that occasion; and then we neither spoke, but our eyes met, and I saw that baseness was in yours still.'

'Why do you talk like this, Bessie? It can do no good. You are so fierce, you frighten me. My nerves are unstrung and sensitive.'

'Unstrung and sensitive!' scoffed the woman, her noble face gathering grandeur and beauty in her passion. 'I will tell you why I talk. Because, for six-and-thirty years I have nursed my wrongs in my heart, which has boiled and boiled, but never been poured out. To whom could I pour it out? Who was to hear the story of my wrong? Was it one to shout to the parish? To publish in the papers?'

'For pity's sake, Bessie, consider me: do not speak so loud; neither of us wishes that story to be known.'

'Ah! on whom fell the shame? On me, who was innocent of all wrong, save of having loved a wretch without manliness. I could have the pity of the place if I told my tale;

but what care I for pity? I let them think me a lost woman, because I did not care to have it thought I had trusted you—*you*.'

'Well, Bessie, the marriage was not legal. The court annulled it.'

'With your consent. Could you not have made it right, had you chosen? Have made me an honest woman, and your son legitimate? No; you were mean enough to cast me over because you could not trouble yourself to fight through life in poverty. What if you had been disinherited? You need not have worked for a living; I would have worked for both. You might have sat at home with your hands in your pockets, and rocked the cradle with your foot; but you would not have had your luxuries then, and therefore I was thrust aside.'

'You cannot say, Bessie, that my father and uncle did not make you an offer that was reasonable. They promised you a yearly allowance.'

'I spurned it; I refused it. I would have nothing of theirs, nothing of yours any more. If I knew what drops in my son's veins were drawn from you, I would wring them forth. If I thought in his heart were any seeds of your baseness, I would dig them out with my nails.'

'Even now, after these many years, I will help you, if you will allow me to do it.'

'I do not want your help—not for myself, I would not take anything of you for myself. I have gone on all these years alone, and now I do not need you. I worked and sustained myself and my son till he was old enough to work and sustain me. Then he married——'

'If, Bessie, he had only looked higher. If you had allowed me to assist—under the rose, without letting people know the circumstances; if he could have been put into some more respectable situation, say a clerkship—why, in time——'

'If, if, if—and in time!' repeated the woman wrathfully. 'Why should he be other than my father, who was a plain man of the people? If my father had been a gentleman, perhaps he also would not have been straight and true and thorough to his wife and his child, his duties and his God. No; I would not have Richard a gentleman; he might have learned falseness and been cruel to me, as you were cruel. I have kept him in my station. He is a poor, rough, plain man, with simple thoughts and simple faith, a simple life, and simple knowledge of right and wrong I would not have him thrown into that tangle which you call social life, where every duty is

blunted with an *if*, and every act is a patchwork of compromises.'

She paused to take breath, and then Gabriel Gotham made a movement to shuffle off.

'Stay!' she ordered. 'You are sneaking away from my reproaches; but I say to you with loud voice now only what your conscience says to you nightly in whispers. You can do nothing for me now. You could do nothing for me after that one great act of treachery. Then, then only did I measure to the bottom of your baseness. If you had come to me later and said you would remarry me, I would have refused you, because I knew you, and I could never have trusted you more.'

'What do you mean by bullying me so?' whined the miserable man. 'You have no consideration for my nerves. You do not know, or if you know, you do not think, what a martyr I am to them; and you tear at my nerves as if you were ripping a harp to pieces. You used to be more kind and pitiful.'

'If you had kept me by your side,' said the woman with a touch of softness, as the appeal of weakness always did melt her, 'I do not think that you would have done amiss for your own self, Gabriel.' She looked at him steadily, and the glare went out of her

eyes. 'A poor, pitiful, broken creature you are, who has slipped into bad ways, because he has none that love him by his side to check and rally him. You are killing yourself, not by inches, but by feet, with opium, Gabriel, as all Hanford knows.'

'I take my drops because I suffer such pain.'

She disregarded his explanation. 'A lonely, unhappy man, suspicious of all about you; preyed upon by the designing; clinging to those that are unscrupulous, who flatter you because they seek your money. You have no one near you to bar the way you are stumbling down; no one to give you a hand to help you up; no one to cheer your spirits when evil fancies and buried transgressions start up to frighten you.—I say, Gabriel, that had you acted as a man and a Christian, you would not be the God-forsaken wretch you now are. You would have a faithful woman at your side to stay you; and a gallant son, on whom you could look with pride and love; and seven little angels to intercede with heaven for you.—Look at these!'—she turned her head to the children who were hanging to her skirts—'see here!' She threw back the shawl and exposed the sleeping babe she carried. She gazed down with a softened face on the

slumbering infant. 'A dry stick,' she said, raising her head, and recovering some of her sternness; 'that is what you are; and in my house is Aaron's rod that buddeth, and putteth forth blossoms, and beareth almonds. You, the wrong-doer, are accursed and barren. I, the wronged, am blessed, as a bedewed field.' Then, all at once, her tears burst forth. 'No!' she said; 'my Aaron's rod is cut asunder, and all the little blossoms will wither. I am like the prophet who took to him two rods, and he called the one Beauty, and the other Bands; and first was Beauty broken, and then the strong rod also.—Do you see these three children? There are four more, and all are orphans. They have lost their mother eleven months ago, and now their father is taken from them. My Richard is drowned, as was his grandfather; and these little ones have none to look to but me. I am getting on in years.' She recovered her composure with an effort; what she had to say concerned the children and their welfare, and she would not allow her own emotion to interfere with her purpose for their advantage. 'I am getting on in years. You, Gabriel, are younger than me; but I am still the strong one. For a while I may be able to earn enough to support the seven; but one is a babe, and I cannot

leave it and take work. They do not bear your name, yet they have your blood in them. For myself, I ask nothing; I would take nothing; but I ask you not to forget these orphans, your own grandchildren.'

'I—will do something,' faltered Gotham. He had lowered his stick when Bessie's rough tone passed away, and now he leaned one hand on it and shook his head, and shuffled his feet on the gravel. 'But, Bessie, I must do it slyly. I mustn't let it be supposed that any obligation attaches to me. I particularly do not wish to have that unfortunate affair brought up now. I—I dislike to have my private matters talked about. I am sensitive, and the least trouble affects my nerves.'

'I am not going to speak; rely on me,' said Bessie gravely. 'Let all the past be dead, buried the wrong and the sin. Forgiveness is a hard plant to grow; it does not strike root freely. I cannot say that it grows lustily in my bosom. There is certain soil in which it will not thrive, nurse it how you may.—But, as for these children, I can do much for them. For their sakes I have come here to-day, for their sakes I plead. I would not die and leave them destitute in the world, beautiful little maids—seven of them, fatherless, motherless, friendless. For their sakes I

will strike my plant Forgiveness once more, and pray God to make it flourish.'

'I will consult with Mr. Cornellis; I will take his opinion how best to manage it; I will do something.'

'Consult with no one but your own conscience, and on your knees with God,' said Bessie Cable.

'I cannot—I cannot act without advice.'

'It has always been so,' said she, half impatiently, half sadly. 'You never were able in the old days to do anything by yourself. Then you came to me. Now you go elsewhere.'

'I assure you that I will do something. Mr. Cornellis knows all about the matter.'

Just then, Mr. Gotham felt something touch his hand. Little Susie, attracted by his ring, had deserted the skirts of her grandmother, and, unnoticed, had stolen over to Mr. Gotham, and as his hand hung limply down, she took his finger in her small hands and began to pull at the ring.

'What—what is it?' he asked with a start. Then he looked down and saw the fair head, the sweet face, with blue eyes and delicate complexion. A lovely little child, with a truly angel face. Gabriel studied it, nervously twitching his head from side to side, and asked: 'What is your name, my dear?'

'Susie.'

'Do you want my ring? You shall have it; and keep it as a proof that—that—— Bessie, I will do what is right by the little ones. It is a pretty child, and might—might do me credit. I think I trace a likeness to myself, when about the same age; she has my hair and my eyes and complexion.'

The little girl still held his finger, and twisted the golden hoop. The touch of the tiny fingers was one so strange to Gabriel, the beauty of the child was so attractive, and its confidence so engaging, that the feeble man was moved.

'I would like to kiss you, child—Susie,' he said, 'but I am afraid of stooping. I might fall; it would bring on neuralgic pains. —Would you mind, Bessie, holding her up, that I might kiss her?'

The woman hesitated. She had the baby in her arms. She could not do as required unless she disposed of it. She stooped, laid the shawl on the gravel at Mr. Gotham's feet, then placed the sleeping infant gently upon it. She put her hands to Susie and raised the child, whilst the other little girl, Lettice, stood by, still holding her grandmother's skirt; but she now extended the other hand and grasped Gotham's cane low down, about

two feet from the ferrule. Thus, unconsciously, the child Lettice linked these two together; and at the same moment he pressed his lips to the cheeks of Susie.

Susie turned her face sharply away—the smell of opium oppressed her. 'I want the ring,' she said.

Then, an explosion, followed by a clatter of bells in the church tower hard at hand, and a cheer. 'What is the matter?' asked Gotham with a start.

The explosion was caused, as he guessed, by the discharge of a small cannon on the shore, fired on grand occasions.

The side-gate opened, and Mr. Cornellis came in, walking quickly. He drew back when he saw the group. 'What!' he exclaimed, 'attacked by a swarm of mosquitoes, Gabriel. Drawing your blood, eh?—Mrs. Cable, you had better run home. Your son has returned; and the lads are giving him an ovation.'

'I want my ring,' said little Susie.

'Another time,' answered Gabriel nervously. 'I—I—had better not. It would lead to inquiries; it might rouse suspicion; and my nerves must not be shaken. I cannot bear it. I will send you some sweeties; but I cannot part with my ring.'

CHAPTER VII.

AN INSULT.

GABRIEL cagerly caught the arm of Mr. Cornellis, and passing his hand through it, suffered himself to be led away from the gate through the winding drive to the house. He did not look back to see the woman and children; his shuffling feet moved hastily, and his arm and head were jerked forward spasmodically, indicating eagerness to get away from an interview that had distressed him.

Mr. Cornellis helped him up the steps and in at his door, and almost led the way to the library, a snug little room, where, indeed, were a few books, but where very little study was done.

Gabriel let himself down into his easy-chair with a groan, and held out his stick to Cornellis, who took it and put it on a rack where Gotham kept an array of hunting-whips and walking-sticks and fishing-rods. The wretched creature was full of small vanities. He liked to deceive himself and others into

the belief that he was a strong athletic man, only deterred from showing his powers by his nervous malady. He talked as if he hunted and shot and fished; but he did none of these things—he never had. He had long given up boating, because the damp and cold on the water brought on neuralgia; and he rarely mounted his horse, because he was too weak to endure the jolting. He had his top-boots, his corduroys, and scarlet coat: but he never wore them except once, to be painted in them. He had a sailor's blue jersey, a complete boating costume, which he put on occasionally, but wore it about the house and grounds, not on the sea. His gun was never discharged, not even at sparrows and starlings, because the noise so near his ear shocked his highly strung and irritable nerves.

He was made up of pretence. Now he was playing with a new assumption, and Justin Cornellis helped to amuse him with it, and flatter him into belief that there was reality in it. This new assumption was that he was going to contest the county at the next general election. He never asked himself whether he seriously contemplated the expense and effort; he amused himself with talking about the campaign, making sketches of electioneering addresses, and drawing up

lists of voters who must be canvassed. So little in earnest was Mr. Gotham that he had not decided on his politics ; he rather thought of standing as an Independent candidate, but whether the shade was to be Liberal Conservative or Conservative Liberal remained undetermined.

Justin Cornellis humoured and flattered him in all his pretences, affected to regard them as serious, and obtained great influence over him accordingly. He never laughed at Gotham, who was sensitive to ridicule, having a lurking consciousness of his inability to do those things to which he pretended. He was incapable of judging for himself, and felt about him for some one stronger than himself to whom he could appeal, and on whom devolve irksome and perplexing duties.

The management of his property was beyond his abilities, and he was jealous and suspicious of every solicitor and agent whom he employed. He had no power of concentrating his attention for long on any subject, or of supervising accounts, or considering the nature of the leases and agreements he was required to sign. He invited Mr. Cornellis, as a disinterested person, to assist him, and soon delegated everything he could delegate to him, to save himself the trouble of going

into the matter. He had himself thrust his neighbour the ex-missionary into the position of unpaid agent for his property, which consisted not only of the manor of Hanford, but of houses in London, and investments in various securities foreign and domestic. His uncle had been a shrewd business man, so also had been his father, and till the death of the latter, Gabriel had allowed Mr. Giles to manage his money matters for him, satisfied so long as he had enough to spend; but after the death of his father, he had put his affairs in several hands, changing out of suspicion that he was being defrauded, and invariably being most apprehensive of dishonesty in the more upright men, because they were straightforward and did not flatter him.

With his usual inherent meanness, he played a part with Cornellis. He was related to Justin Cornellis, whose mother had been a Gotham; and it was partly for his wife's health, and chiefly to be near a man of means to the reversion of whose estate he might lay claim, that Cornellis had settled at Hanford. Mr. Gabriel Gotham encouraged the ex-missionary to think that he would inherit the property after his, Gabriel's, death—without, however, having really so by will disposed of his property. By holding out this hope before

Cornellis, he secured his fidelity and obtained his services.

But Gabriel Gotham was only an extreme instance of that shallow pretence which cloaks the life of everyone of us who moves in society. Our very waistcoats are a pretence: they assume to be all cloth, and are only cloth on the front that shows; they are calico behind. And so is it with our manners, our conversation: it is all only half what it pretends to be; the cloth does not go the whole way round the heart. We have smiles and a squeeze of the hand for an acquaintance—a front of cordiality, a back of indifference. We are liberal in opinion, generous in action, frank in demeanour, sympathetic in intercourse; but the backing is all narrowness, meanness, closeness, and selfishness. The writer once thus addressed a little boy: 'Why, Fred, what an extraordinary fit your nether garments are!' —'Yes, sir,' answered Fred; 'they are reversible. When I've sat out one side, I turn 'em about and sit out the other.' Which of us dare reverse our moral garment, that has only one face good? Which of us dare expose the calico and hide the cloth? Yet let the moralist growl: there is merit in pretence. The world would be an unendurable world were it not for the painted screens, and the disguises

which conceal its ugliness, its waste and lumber. What pleasure should we reap from social intercourse, were our acquaintance to tell us exactly what they thought of us? Do they not exercise self-restraint in hiding from us that we bore them? Why should the worst side be thrust to the fore? Every picture has two sides, every flower has an ugly sordid root. We show the blossom of life to our neighbours, and do not thrust the root into their faces. The man who blurts out all his mind, and the woman who despises conventionalities, are shunned—they are agreeable to no one, not even to themselves. To a meal belong empty wine-bottles, potato parings, cabbage stalks, old bones, and fag-ends of grizzle, together with cinders and dust from the kitchen fire; but also very good wine and toothsome dishes. The ash-heap and the pig-pail get the first, and we the rest. We are not swine, to be given the refuse; nor scavengers, to carry off the dust. Life is a milk-pan; and to it belong cream and sediment; we exhibit the cream and cast away the sediment; we retain the thin skimmed milk for our private consumption. Then, not a word against pretence! It invests life with grace; it saves it from becoming material. Without it, life is not worth having.

There is even heroic virtue in pretence. It is generous, it is unselfish. We offer the best to others; we keep the thin and poor for ourselves. Our neighbours know that what we offer is superficial; but they are superficial likewise, and give us back in return their best—hearty welcome, smiles, cheerful conversation—in a word, they give us all their cream. When our faces have vanished, they sit down to sup 'sky-blue.' The fire blazes in the drawing-room for the visitor; but the lady shivers at her needlework in her fireless room upstairs. The visitor enjoys the warmth for ten minutes; she endures the cold the long day, because the coal-bill is too heavy to allow of a second fire. The visitor has hot mutton; when he is gone, the family eats the cold remains. The visitor has the silver candlestick, and every one else a benzoline lamp. For the guest, the best Worcester or Swansea service is produced; when he is gone, it is put away, and the household dines off very cheap chipped ware. The guest, if very young and green, goes away impressed with the comfortable circumstances of his late host.

Then, I say again, not a word against pretence; it is one of the first of human virtues.

There are pretences and pretences. Mr.

Gabriel Gotham was contemptible because his pretences profited no one; not because they were in themselves pretence. We are selfish in our estimate of pretence. We condone, even applaud that which conduces to our own comfort, and blame and deprecate that out of which we reap no advantage.

'So, they have been here sponging,' said Mr. Cornellis. 'I knew it would be so. But the old woman did not know her man. She thought you soft, weak, easily moved by the tale of misery. The whole thing was cleverly got up, a theatrical effect—the baby, the twins. But you see through these sort of things. Not so soft as supposed, eh, Gabriel?'

'Mrs. Cable thought her son was drowned, and was in distress about the children.'

'O yes—of course. Yet the bells are ringing for the return of Richard. She knew he was safe; but she wanted to wrest a promise of help from you before the news reached you. It was ingenious, but not honest. With another man, it might have succeeded, but not with you.'

'No,' said Gabriel dispiritedly; 'perhaps not with me. She said I was weak. Indeed, she was not polite.'

'Tried the domineering dodge, did she?'

said Cornellis. 'Had no consideration for your nerves?'

'None in the least,' answered Gabriel. 'What I have suffered is more than words can describe—I will ring the bell. I must have some Chartreuse; I am so shaken, so overcome by the scene. It was very distressing to me.—You will have some of the liqueur also. I feel as if I should sink if I did not take some; and all my nerves are in a quiver.'

'If she comes again, send her to me.'

'I will do so, Cornellis; I cannot endure another interview.'

'You have made no promise.'

'I—I only said that if the children were really left orphans, I would consider what was to be done. I would not let them starve; but I made the condition that nothing was to transpire; and I thought it would be wise for me to manage the matter through you, so that no suspicion might attach to me, and because I really am not equal to the fatigue and excitement. Bessie is a very alarming woman, so impulsive, threatening.'

'That is like you, ever cautious and prudent. Ah! what a man you are!' exclaimed Cornellis; 'always ready at an emergency. And with those shattered nerves too! If I did not see it, it would seem incredible.'

The Chartreuse was brought in. Gabriel's hand shook so that he was unable to fill the liqueur glasses; therefore Mr. Cornellis helped his friend and himself. As he was sipping his Chartreuse, he laughed, and put down the glass.

'What is it?' asked Gotham, with a suspicious twitch in his mouth. He disliked to hear laughter; he thought that he was the object of derision.

'I was thinking of the condition of those Cables,' said the ex-missionary. 'Supposing they carried their point, and all the seven little brats became heiresses of your estate, what a scramble there would be among the ragtag of the place for them! What airs the young misses would give themselves! How they would flout about in fine feathers and silks, and brag of their grandfather, talking in their broad vulgar Essex dialect, so close akin to Cockney, of wessels and winegar and poins and wiolets.'

'Very funny,' sniggered Gotham. 'But they have not got my property yet.'

'And never will,' said Cornellis. 'If you wanted to send them to the bad, you could not better insure their ruin. They make respectable mudlarks. Dress them in peacock plumes, and they become vulgar fowl.'

'They are pretty,' said Gotham.

'As children. But with that class, good looks disappear early. Good looks associated with bad manners, dirty nails, fine clothes, and dropped *h*s, make a hideous muddle.'

'I suppose you are right,' said Gabriel with a sigh. He thought of the little hand closed about his finger, and the warm sense that stole from it up his arm to his heart. 'Poor little things! They have my blood in them—that accounts for their good looks.'

'But how diluted with ditch-water! If Richard had married some one of a superior class, there might have been improvement; but as it is, the deterioration is irretrievable.'

'You know what I have done, Justin,' said Mr. Gotham, after a pause. 'Give me another glass of Chartreuse; I spilled half the last, my hand shakes so.'

'I beg your pardon. What have you done?'

'You know what I have done. I could not manage in any other way to keep my memory clear of reproach and to save my conscience. I have left everything to you, and you have my secret instructions. Should Richard be ever in want of money, you will let him have it; and the little girls must not be allowed to need. You will manage all

that for me. I am a poor frail creature, and may drop off any day.'

'Not a bit—not a bit. You have to become an M.P. yet, squire. It will do you good to contest an election. By Jove! I would not be the man to stand against you, known as you are, and respected in the county, and generally beloved.'

'I am respected, I believe.'

'And loved. Every one sympathises with your infirmities.'

'They are temporary. I may look to a time when I shall be able to go out after the hounds, and speak and take my place in the House without being subject to these neuralgic attacks.'

'Certainly you may. I believe they have been brought on by worry. This wretched affair of the Cable woman has tormented you for years.'

'For near on forty years,' said Gotham.

'You have felt that something must be done, and yet you could not, with respect for yourself, your name and position, in any way countenance a claim. Now you have, with your usual sagacity, hit on a mode of extrication out of the dilemma. Rely on me. I am a plain, straightforward man, and I will execute your wishes with fidelity, should the

time come when I am called on to do so; but——' Cornellis laughed. 'By Jove! Gotham, which is the most likely to outlive the other? I have been battered about in the East and in Africa, and have had fevers and privations; whilst you—you tough old fox-hunting squire, lapped in luxury, have a constitution like heart of oak, only temporarily troubled by neuralgia—all brought about by external worry—produced by that insinuating woman. Don't tell me the contrary—she ran away with you She was half a dozen years older than yourself.

'Only two.'

'A woman ripens before a man, in wits as in everything else. She drew you on—it was a plant; and uncommonly lucky you were to get out of your difficulty as you did. I am not sure, you clever dog, that you had not prepared the loop-hole beforehand.'

'On my honour, it was not so.'

'In love, as in war, all is fair,' said Cornellis. 'In this little game the play was first-rate. It was checkmate after the first two moves.'

Mr. Gotham held out his glass for more liqueur. 'As Richard has returned, it is possible that Josephine may not be lost,' he said, as Mr. Cornellis poured out the Chartreuse.

'She is not lost; she has come home.'

'What—Josephine! How did she escape?'

'In a somewhat singular manner. She was blown out to sea, and picked up by the lightship, which also lost its moorings, and was wrecked on a sandbank.'

'What—Richard and Josephine?'

'Yes, Cable was in the vessel.'

'But not the boy. I heard he had come ashore before the gale, so that Richard was alone in the boat.'

'No, the boy was not there.'

'Only Richard and Josephine. That was quite romantic—Paul and Virginia.'

Mr. Cornellis bit his lip. 'Excuse me, Gabriel; I do not like this joke. You are clever and witty, but my daughter must not be made a subject of your satire.'

'Ah! Cornellis,' said Gabriel with a sigh, 'that was a pity, that marriage of Richard's. If he had but looked above him. If, for instance, he could have aspired to your Josephine.'

'He would not have had her,' said Cornellis.

'Why not? I could then, perhaps, have done something for him through you.'

'I would not have suffered it.' The ex-missionary for a moment lost his temper. 'I could not allow my daughter to marry a

common sailor, and one who is without a father.'

Gabriel fidgeted in his chair, with his elbows on the arms of the seat, and spilt his Chartreuse down his waistcoat. 'I was but supposing a case,' he said—'supposing it for my own convenience. If I had particularly wished it, Justin, perhaps you would have yielded. The fellow has good blood in his veins, you know, though the world does not know it.'

'Exactly—the world does not; and we must consider the opinion of the world. A man may have the blood of a peer; but if he is not in Debrett, he is a commoner to me. Let us change the subject, Gabriel. Let us go over together the list of the voters.'

'Not now, Justin; I cannot attend to business. Do you not see how white, how twitching my poor cheek is? There is a nerve which reaches from the brain down the whole side of the system to the small toe—that nerve is just as though pulled and twisted and nipped with pincers. I am in indescribable pain. I cannot remain here any longer. You will allow me to go upstairs; I must have recourse to my drops for relief. Take some more Chartreuse. There is noyau, if you prefer it, or absinthe. You will not be offended if I

leave you. I have been over-wrought. I shall not be in a condition to see you till to-morrow afternoon; I must have complete rest after the trials and exertions of to-day.' He shuffled to the door.

Cornellis did not remain after Gotham retired. He was angered out of his usual equanimity; the suggestion made by the wretched man had stung him like an insult. 'That he should dare—should dare to think of such a thing!' he muttered as he walked back to Rose Cottage. 'My Josephine and his——' He clenched his fist, and did not complete his sentence.

CHAPTER VIII.

PAT-A-CAKE.

THE cottage inhabited by Mrs. Cable with her grandchildren, and by Richard, her son, when ashore, was small, built of boards, painted white, with green windows, and a vivid green door. A good many houses in this part were of wood. When a wreck was broken up, the planks of the deck, sold very cheap, were bought, and served for the construction of cottages; they were laid on, feathered or weather-boarded, so that no joint could let in wind and rain. In the west of England such houses would not last; the ever moist atmosphere would bring about rot; but along the east coast the sun is hot and the air dry, and these wooden houses will endure for a century. The cottage was tiled; and over the brown tiles was laid a trellis of wood, on which a vine was stretched. The vine was not allowed to extend over the wooden walls; but it rioted on the roof and there ripened its purple

clusters. That was a great day for the elder of the seven children, when father ascended a ladder and scrambled over the roof, plucking the grape bunches, sweet and warm from the sun's kisses, and gave a cluster to each.

Between the road and the cottage was a narrow strip of garden, hedged with sweet-briar. In this strip grew tulips, narcissi, polyanthi, and velvety, brown, yellow-eyed auriculas. The soil suited bulbs, as does that of Holland.

The principal garden was at the back of the cottage; it covered an acre, and extended to a ditch and a line of willows, fine trees that whitened in every wind. In those willows the nightingales built every year. Near the dike also grew a large ungainly mulberry; it had been originally a branch of an old tree, cut off by a former inhabitant of the cottage who had been gardener at the Hall; and he had stuck the branch into the soil of his own garden, where it had taken root and grown into a tree that bore fruit in due season, but never grew into a gainly, goodly tree. Nor could the children enjoy all its fruit, for it leaned towards the dike, and dropped many of its fleshy berries into the water, where they floated, nibbled at by tadpoles and gudgeon. But there were enough for the little ones shed upon the

gravel and grass, and they picked them up at the time when they fell, and put them in bottles with sugar, and ate them as they listed, smearing their lips and hands with purple.

In the hedge were some sloe bushes clipped like thorns, and the bitter blue berries were also eagerly sought by the children; but they were not suffered to pick the bullace, tiny round plums off a small tree in the angle of the garden. These grandmother made into preserves against the season when there was no fruit.

Now was spring, and there was promise of yield; the storm had torn off the petals of the apples, but the low-growing bullace and the sloe blossoms had set before the storm.

The children were all out in the sun, sitting on the bank, with the sloe bushes behind them. They wore no hats or caps; the light air played with their shining yellow hair. They sat watching their father, who was digging in the garden; and Mary, the eldest, had the baby on her lap. Grandmother was within, engaged on household duties. Numerous white butterflies were about, chasing each other, gambolling over the broccoli plants, and seemed like flickering willow leaves adrift in the air. Every Essex garden along the coast has its bed of white poppies. The people

suffering from ague and low fever have faith in the decoction of the round seed-vessels; but there were no poppies in Cable's garden. Bessie had never approved of the use of the narcotic, because her mother had insisted that, in Cornwall, folks got on very well without it.

Richard had a bundle of peasticks; and after he had earthed up his early potatoes, he began to stake the delicate trailing peas that were already bursting into white blossom. They should have been staked before; but his duties on the lightship had prevented his attending to them earlier.

Little Susie sat nearest the herb-bed, which was laid out on the slope to the hedge, and faced the sun. A way to the beach went behind this hedge; it had a wall between it and the garden—a low wall, three feet high, and from the wall into the garden sloped the bank. On top of it grew the sloes. The wall and bank ended at the dike, and thence the path dissipated itself in strands of gravel among coarse turf; a trodden way from the village led to the expanse of wild ground, and from the edge of that every one went his own path.

The herbs grown on this bank were thyme, marjoram, mint, and rue. Baby, asleep on Mary's lap, had a handful of crushed young

leaves of mint in her tiny grasp. She had been allowed to feel and smell the fresh leaves, and had grabbed them to thrust them into her mouth. When plucked away she had retained a handful, and gone to sleep still holding it.

The bees were busy over the garden, searching in the full sweet flowers; and Susie watched a great bumble which was clogging his hind legs with pollen from the blossoms, when she was startled to see something like a big spider creep from under the leafy sloes and run down among the thyme towards her. It was a thin white human hand, with the nerves strongly accentuated, and the blue veins puffed on the back. On one finger was a gold ring with a bloodstone in it, engraved with arms. Susie knew nothing of arms, but she recognised the ring, and the bottle-green cuff on the arm to which the hand belonged; and throwing herself over on her breast, she laid hold of the hand with both hers, and proceeded to pull at the ring, which she had failed to secure two days before in the grounds of the Hall.

As she lay among the thyme trying to get the ring off, she saw under the dense foliage of the sloes, between the stems, the face of the gentleman who had spoken to granny in

the Hall grounds. She could make out that it was the same; she saw his pale blue watery eyes and his thin nose. The sun shone now on one side of his nose, and she thought that she could see crimson on the other side instead of shadow. He held his finger up to his lips and nose, and his head nodded.

Susie tugged at the hand and twisted the ring, but could not get it off.

'What are you about, Susie?—crushing the thyme?' called her father.

The little child turned her golden head round, let go the finger, and made some answer which Richard did not catch and understand. When Susie looked again for the hand, it was withdrawn.

Voices were audible on the path behind the hedge.

'What! Mr. Gotham, you here? Come out to solicit votes from the winkles, or to tally-ho after the crabs?'

'I—I don't like being chaffed,' answered the gentleman. 'I am glad to see you, dear Josephine, after your fortunate escape from the sea.'

'To-day is the last meet of the harriers,' said the girl. 'Why are you not with them? Cousin Gotham, are not you something like the crab and lobster, that assume their scarlet

when their hunting days are over, and they are boiled and done for?'

'Your peril of life has not improved you,' complained Gabriel. 'You are very hard and unkind.'

'I!' laughed the girl. 'Not a bit; only I do not humbug you, like others. Now I must leave you.'

'What are you doing here, so far from home?'

'I have come to thank my preserver and see his little ones, for whom I have brought some sweetmeats.'

'You came across the turf, I suppose?'

'Yes. Have I been trespassing? Will you prosecute me?'

Richard Cable had heard Josephine's voice and what she said. He stood upright, holding a pea-stick, and his face became of a warm colour. He hesitated whether to leave his work and go to the bank and speak to her over the hedge, or remain where he was, and wait till she came. Whilst he hesitated, he heard her calling him from behind the dike.

'Mr. Cable! Have you a plank? I will come over to you this way, instead of going round by the street.'

'There is a bridge, miss, a little farther down.'

He threw down the stick, and walked along the brink of the ditch to the end, and opened a wicket-gate that closed the passage over a plank.

She tripped across and came through the gate. 'Where are the children?' she asked; then answered herself: 'Oh—there! sitting in the sun. What yellow heads they all have, and blue eyes. How many? Seven did you say? I see but six. Ah! one carries the baby. What a frightful burden a baby must be—like an imposition at school.'

'Did you ever, when a little child, go out a walk in spring and dig up a primrose, and carry it home in the lap of your pinafore?' asked Cable.

'I did not wear pinafores when I went out of doors.'

'Of your frock, then?'

'I dare say I may have done so.'

'It was a burden; but it was a delight. I have seven little roots of primroses in my arms, and I carry them gladly wherever I go, thinking nothing of their weight,' said Richard Cable. 'Love lightens burdens.'

'If ever I did dig up a flower, you may be sure I made the nurse carry it for me.'

'I will let no one carry mine for me,' he said, and caught up the baby and kissed it;

then Mary, held her to his heart a moment and set her down again; then Susie, Effie, Jane, Martha, Lettice; and as he held up each, he named the child, only the baby he did not name—that was Bessie, called after his mother. 'Look here, Miss Cornellis; Bessie is wearing the socks I knitted when we were wrecked. I finished them before I got home.'

'I am not surprised at the children loving you,' said Josephine. 'I should love any one who cared for me.'

'Have you no one to do that?'

She shook her head. 'My father—after his fashion; my aunt—after hers; neither, no one—after yours.'

He looked at her attentively. It seemed to him indeed a marvellous thing that this beautiful girl should complain of lack of love.

'Go on,' she said, 'with your gardening. I will not disturb you. Let me sit on the bank with the children and talk to them, and watch you, and I will sing to them a song and feed them with sweetmeats.'

Then, almost reluctantly, he returned to the planting of the pea-rods; and as he worked he looked across between the alder-sticks at Josephine, who had taken a place on the

sloping bank and thrown off her hat, as the shadow of the twinkling willows fell athwart the place she had selected. She took out a cornet from a small basket she carried, and the children instinctively gathered round her.

'It is a duty,' she said to herself—'a duty that must be gone through. I promised Cable to visit and play with his white mice.' Then, as she held up a candied elval plum, and the little creatures raised themselves towards it with wide eyes and open mouths, and their golden hair rolled back over their shoulders —'After all, the creatures are pretty, and perhaps less insupportable than most children are,' she said to herself.

She wore a light dress, with a crimson ribbon about her throat supporting a gold locket. There were crimson bows on her pretty dress, sprigged and spotted with rose. The red agreed with her dark hair and complexion.

Richard Cable continued to observe her as he worked. He was flattered and pleased that she took notice of his children and sat down among them to amuse them.

She sang to them. She had a rich, cultivated voice; she sang the same mermaid's air that she had sung in the stranded ship—the song from *Oberon*. Richard Cable could

not understand the words, knew nothing of the origin of the song; but he recalled the melody at once—a lovely melody, lovely among all the beautiful creations of Weber. Josephine took little Bessie, the baby, in her arms, and swayed the child as she sang—

O wie wogt es sich schön auf der Fluth,
Wenn die müde Welle im Schlummer ruht!

Cable signed to Mary, who looked round to her father with a pleased face; and Mary started to her feet and ran to him when he beckoned.

'Bring me her hat; do not let her see,' whispered Cable.

Then the child rejoined the group, and presently returned with the straw hat of Josephine.

Richard had stooped to the border of red double daisies and gathered some, and these he now thrust under the red ribbon that girded the white straw. Then he resumed his work; and when Josephine had ceased she heard a whistle, soft and sweet, repeating from among the pea-sticks the air of the mermaid's song.

'Hark, hark!' exclaimed Josephine laughing; 'do you hear the nightingale? It has caught my air.'

'No!' said little Effie. 'It is dada whistling.'

'He knows that tune,' said Mary. 'He has whistled it since he came home to us.'

Richard Cable had not known it before he heard the girl sing it on the stranded lightship; after that, he could not shake it out of his head. Why did not Cable leave his work and go up to the girl and speak to her? Was his work of so great importance that it could not be neglected for a few minutes? Was his time so precious that he could devote none of it to her? No; he was afraid of her. He was indeed attracted by her; but the attraction she exercised on him alarmed him. He had thought a good deal about her since he had returned home; as the tune of the mermaid's song hung about his memory, so did her face, so did the words she had said, the intonation of her voice, the movements of her graceful body. All the time that she sang and played with his children, he was aware of a power exerted to draw him to her through the barrier he built up between of pea-sticks. Nevertheless, he would not yield to the force, because he had an instinctive consciousness that it was harmful to him, would disturb his peace of mind, and trouble his relations to his children. She, also, as she sat with the children, wanted

him to leave his gardening and come to her. She was drawn to him by his simplicity, his sympathy, gentleness, and truth—qualities she did not meet with in her own home, and which possessed a strange fascination for her. She had told him to continue his work, but was vexed that he had taken her at her word.

Then she called out: 'Come here, Mr. Cable! I must show you something.'

He could not refuse; he came slowly towards her, shyly, with his cap off, and the sun on his curling hair.

'See!' she exclaimed gleefully; 'I have taught your baby something. It can even now enjoy Pat-a-cake Baker's man. You told me on the ship that it had not reached that pitch of education; I have carried her over the Rubicon.'

Cable smiled as he saw Josephine repeat the infantile verses whilst she struck the baby's little palms. As the group was intent on the play, they heard a cough; and Josephine, looking round, was surprised to see her father in the garden. She coloured, rose up, and gave the baby to Mary.

'I have come to see you, Mr. Cable,' said Cornellis. 'I little supposed that I should find my daughter here. She ought to be at home; it is her practising hour on the

piano; but her late escapade has unhinged her: she neither recognises what she ought to do, nor is aware where she ought not to go.'

'How did you come here, papa?' asked Josephine, not at all abashed.

'I came by the door of the house. Mrs. Cable told me I should find her son in the garden; she did not tell me I would find you here.'

'She did not know. I came over the dike.'

'It is indifferent to me how you came; I shall take good care to see you back,' he said coldly. 'I am here to speak not to you, but to Mr. Cable.' He turned to Richard, who looked at him with a puzzled expression.

'You were good enough to save Miss Cornellis from drowning,' said the gentleman stiffly, with a cold face. 'I have felt it my duty to come here to offer you a small gratuity —acknowledgment, I mean, for your services. I cannot in conscience allow your act to pass unrewarded.'

Cable became very red.

Josephine looked sharply at him.

'I expect no acknowledgment,' said the sailor curtly.

'You may not expect it; but that will not prevent your accepting it—a ten-pound note.'

Cable put his hand behind him. 'I will receive nothing, sir,' he said. 'What I did for Miss Josephine was my duty. I would do it for any one. I refuse an acknowledgment. I am paid already, over and over, by Miss Josephine's visit to-day.'

'That is right,' said Josephine, with a flash out of her brown eyes. 'I knew you would refuse.'

'Of course I do. I would do anything in the world for you, if you were in any danger, in any trouble; you know that, I hope?'

'I am sure of it,' said the girl.

Cable was agitated, partly with anger at the proposal of the father, partly with exultation at the daughter's recognition of his readiness to serve her unrewarded.

'Papa,' said Josephine, with a wicked light in her eyes and her lips twitching maliciously, 'if you are really grateful to Dicky Cable and wish to please him, not humiliate him, shall I tell you what to do?'

'What?' he asked frowning.

'Play Pat-a-cake with the baby.' She stooped, caught up little Bessie, gave her a kiss, and held the child towards her father.

Mr. Cornellis turned sharply away. 'How can you be so inconsiderate, so foolish, Josephine! Come home instantly with me.'

From behind the sloe hedge sounded a cackling laugh; but though Cornellis heard it, he gave it no heed.

As he left the cottage with Josephine, he turned to her with an ugly expression on his mouth, and said: 'You are a fool. Do you not know what you are exposing yourself to? Do you not think that people will talk?'

'Talk—talk about what?'

'I say you are a fool. I've heard sneers already—about you and that lout.'

'What lout?'

'Richard Cable.'

'Dicky? I do not care.'

CHAPTER IX.

ON THE TERRACE.

JOSEPHINE lived in a condition of feud with her father. In her heart she repented of her rebelliousness; but when present with him, the antagonism broke out again, in spite of good intentions. She had naturally a good heart, truthful character, and abhorrence of meanness, but met at every turn with evidences of her father's insincerity and self-seeking. This condition of warfare had embittered her heart and sharpened her tongue.

We begin life as believers, and end it as sceptics. We begin with trustfulness, and go on through every stage of disillusion into absolute mistrust. As children, we look up to everyone; as old men we look down on all. We expect this process to take place within us: to find out one subterfuge after another, to discover hollowness wherever we tap, and dust behind every rind; and we are pleased at the ingenuousness of the young, who believe

all things to be solid and the rind to cover richness.

Josephine was brought up in an atmosphere so clear that no illusion was possible in it. Her father's conversation dispelled all faith in what is good and noble and real. His example was level with his opinion. He made no scruple to let his sister and daughter see the strings that controlled his movements, the hollowness of all his profession. Instead, therefore, of beginning life as a child with belief, she began with suspicion and distrust.

She was drawn to Richard Cable and his household by the contrast he and it exhibited to her father and her own home. She stepped at once from the scenery of a theatre to natural landscape, from a hothouse to breezy open air. And as that which is true and wholesome always exercises attraction on a nature not wholly depraved, Josephine woke to consciousness of many fibres in her soul linking her to the Cable family, and to acknowledge a fascination which she could not explain.

Her father did not forbid her to go to the cottage ; perhaps he so completely disbelieved in her obedience, that he thought it useless to do so. Instead, he sneered and threw about insinuations which offended her, and stirred

in her the spirit of opposition, which always slumbered in her heart, waiting to be aroused. His remarks about Cable were so unjust and ungenerous, that she resented them indignantly; their injustice spurred her sense of fairness into assertion. The perverse tactics of Justin Cornellis recoiled on himself. Had he forbidden Josephine to go to the cottage, she would have obeyed sullenly, and admitted in the end that he had ordered discreetly; but as he took the other course, she persisted in her visits against her better judgment.

Aunt Judith exercised neither authority nor influence on the wayward girl. She was a lazy woman, who believed in her brother's cleverness, and thrust all responsibilities upon his shoulders. So long as she was comfortable all was well. The profitable was always right, and success was the sanction of conduct however tortuous. She reflected, in this, the general opinion, took her tone from what prevails. We heap scorn on Mrs. Grundy when she shakes her head over the gentleman who has a good cellar, and his lady who gives splendid balls; she is only listened to when she utters her doubts about the propriety of calling on that couple which drives a pony-chaise, and the grass-widow whose garden is too circumscribed for lawn-tennis. Those

who have difficulty in making both ends meet have every one picking at their frayed edges; but those whose incomes are double-breasted are panoplied as in armour. When we reckon our income by hundreds, we scarce dare express an opinion; but when by thousands, we may calculate on our platitudes being regarded as words to be treasured. We return cold-shoulder to him, who, when we drop in unexpectedly, gives us cold leg of mutton at dinner. A surgeon must put his groom in livery and drive a dashing turn-out before he receives a fee. If he walks to see his patients, no one will give a fig for his opinion. I know a banker who stopped a run and averted ruin by putting his footman into red velvet breeches: no one supposed that the bank was tottering, when Jeames assumed new carnation inexpressibles.

'I wish, Josephine,' said Mr. Cornellis, 'you would run across to the Hall and learn what has become of Mr. Gotham. I have not seen him these three days. He has not been here; and when I went to inquire, he was not visible; stupified with opium, I suppose. Tell him that I will come over and have a game of billiards with him if he be so inclined. Throw in a word about Aunt Judith,' he added, with a scornful laugh.

'Yes and no, papa,' answered Josephine. 'I will go, and I will say nothing about my aunt.' She took her hat and went to the Hall.

Mr. Gotham was in his garden, on the terrace, and the servant guided her to him. 'I have had the geraniums bedded out,' he said. 'I like to look on. Do you see how my roses are coming out?'

'Shall I tell papa you do not care for billiards to-day?' asked Josephine, who was impatient to be gone.

'I do not know; I will consider. Stay a while, and talk to me. That will be better than billiards. I am a little easier to-day, and am enjoying the sun.—These are very lovely grounds, are they not, dear Josephine?'

'Very lovely.'

'Hardly anyone sees them. It will not do for me to allow people the run of them; they would pull off the branches, pluck the flowers, and trample the grass. Yet, I suppose, if I am going to stand for the county, I must do this, allow a free day for the public, and keep indoors all that day as a prisoner. I do not mind your walking here whenever you like.'

'Thank you, Cousin Gotham.'

'It has occurred to me,' he said in a shy

manner, twitching his head from side to side, 'that those children I saw you with the other day might like to see the grounds. Who were they? What were their names?'

'Oh, the seven little daughters of Richard Cable, the lightshipman.'

'They are pretty children. I peeped through the hedge as I was passing, and saw you surrounded by them.'

'I thought I saw you peeping before I went into the garden.'

'I peeped twice—once before, once after. In fact, I heard the chatter of little voices, and saw something shining under the leaves and thorn-boughs: and could not make out what it was, till I stooped, and then I saw it was the golden hair of little children sitting on the bank. Afterwards, I heard you singing to them, and I peeped again. You like them, I presume? What are their names?'

'Cable.'

'I mean their Christian names.'

'Mary and Effie and Jane, Martha, Lettice, Susan, and Bessie. I think that is the order, but am not sure. Effie and Jane are twins.'

'Bessie—Bessie Cable,' murmured the old man, and he rubbed one trembling hand over the other. 'I wonder why she is called Bessie.'

'After her grandmother.'

'Has she dark hair and dark eyes like—like her?'

'No. All the children are fair, very fair. They remind me of a group of cherubs' faces by Sir Joshua Reynolds.'

'It is strange to find such beauty among persons so low in life,' said Gabriel Gotham.—'Sit down, Josephine, on this garden seat by me—sit and talk. I enjoy the sun; it does my neuralgia good, now that the wind is less cold and without east in it. I suppose that these children take after their father?'

'I never saw their mother. You know she is dead.'

'I know!—I know nothing whatever about them. Is she dead? Oh, I did hear about it. She was a maid at the rectory, I fancy. Richard might have looked higher. He is a handsome man. He is not like his mother.'

'She is a very fine old woman, so stately, with a grand way about her. I think Mr. Cable derives something in his manner and his reserved way from her; but she is dark, and he is fair. Did you ever know his father?'

'His father!' Mr. Gotham started.

'There is some mystery about him. Richard Cable says he never saw him; he

deserted Mrs. Cable when he, Richard, was an infant.'

Mr. Gotham fidgeted. 'You see those little children occasionally,' he said evasively. 'Perhaps it would please them to come into these grounds. I—I will have the wicket on the seawall open, and you can bring them in some day, and take them about; and if they like to pick any of the syringa, or laburnum, or rhododendron, I shall not mind. It would be pretty—would it not—to put the laburnum chains about their little gold heads?'

'No doubt it would please them.'

'You will not say anything about this to Mrs. Cable; she might object. Take them out for a stroll on the shore, and you will find the gate unlocked. Give a push, and it will open; then bring them in. I shall not be in the garden; I shall know nothing about their being here. No precedent will be established. But say nothing to Mrs. Cable.'

'Why not? She would have no objections.'

'I do not know; she would think it an intrusion. She might fear the children would do damage, and forbid it. I had rather you said nothing to her either before or after.'

'I will do as you wish.'

'When? This afternoon?'

'No; to-morrow.'

'I—I think there are some empty nests in the Banksian rose trailed against the terrace wall. If you look in, or hold up the little ones to peep in, they may perhaps find eggs there—pink and white, almond and sugar. That would please them—make them laugh, eh?'

'I am sure it would.'

'I shall not be here; I shall be in my room. I shall perhaps hear them laugh, and it will divert me, especially if I am in pain at the time. But I shall not appear, my green jalousies will be down. If I appeared, I might seem to sanction the intrusion, and there is no knowing where invasion would stop. I should have all the parish coming here to pull up my bulbs, and pluck my roses, and break the statues and vases. I do not like the public; it is boisterous, and leaves traces where it romps of sandwich papers and empty ginger-beer bottles. When grounds are thrown open to it, the public is noisy, and I cannot bear noise. I suffer acutely in my nerves. There is a long nerve extending from the temple to the foot—— But there; I will not speak of that. It begins to twitch and shoot the moment I

allude to it. Richard Cable is a fine man, a handsome man.—Look at this standard rose, Josephine. Do you know what it is? General Jacqueminot, a hybrid perennial. It is a superb rose. Do you know on what it grows? On wild-brier stock. It is budded. Below the bud, the root, the stem, are all wild, vulgar, hedge dog-rose. I should think Richard Cable was a budded rose; we know the stock is common, but—consider! What a man the father must have been, to have such a tall, stalwart, handsome son! You do not know Greek, Josephine, or you would understand what I mean when I say *anax andrôn*—a king of men.'

'I dare say. It is a pity his father does not see him. Cable is a man to be proud of; he is not only a fine man, but he is a true and good man.'

'The children are pretty children, are they not? Like Reynolds's angels, you said.'

'They are very pretty, unusually pretty children.'

'They do not take after their grandmother; Mrs. Cable is dark.'

'But perhaps their mother was fair.'

'Oh, their mother was nothing, a very common sort of creature. If they do not take after their grandmother, it must be after

their grandfather. He must have been possessed of great personal beauty when he was young.'

To this Josephine made no reply; she was not interested in the question as to the appearance of the unknown grandfather.

'There is, I hear, a good deal of high quality, self-respect, and sterling goodness in Richard Cable?'

'He is a thorough man.'

'He could not have had that from his mother, who is only a common woman.'

'Why not? She is a superior person. I like her; she is so dignified.'

'He has not her eyes and hair. Rely on it, he draws also his moral and mental qualities from the other side. What a man that father must have been!'

'I do not think it or he would not have deserted him.'

Mr. Gotham kicked the gravel about with his toes, first with one foot, then with the other, and worked a hole with his stick among the shingle that covered the terrace.

'What does your father think of Richard Cable?' he asked at length.

'Papa! Oh, he calls him a lout and a booby.'

'He does not like him?'

'No—he has taken a prejudice against him; why, I cannot tell.'

'I suppose he has done something to testify to Richard Cable his gratitude for the services he rendered you?'

'He offered him a ten-pound note, and Richard refused it, I am glad to say.'

'You are glad. Why?'

'Because papa should have given him either a great deal, or nothing at all.'

'Cable deserves something for his goodness to you, his care and his kindness.'

'He deserves a great deal; but he is too proud—too much of a gentleman at heart, to accept anything, offered as my father offered it.'

Mr. Gotham considered a while, still working a hole in the ground with the end of his stick. He looked slyly out of the corners of his eyes at Josephine, and then down at the burrow he was making. 'It is no concern of mine,' said he after a while. 'But for the sake of something to talk about, we will pursue the subject. I suppose Cable has his ambitions. What is he going to do now? Go on with his duties as lightshipman, or take to some other line of life?'

'Nothing else offers. The ship will be replaced; I suppose a better one than that

old cut-down tub. But I fancy Richard would rather take to something which did not withdraw him so much from home. I heard him one day say that if he only had a boat of his own, he would be a fisherman.'

'Why should he not have a boat?'

'He cannot afford one. Boats are expensive.'

'Why should not you give him one?'

'I!' Josephine almost started to her feet, she was so astonished at the proposition.

'Yes, you. Why not? He saved your life. You feel indebted to him. Give him what would make him happy. Do not ask him if he will have it and give him opportunity of declining; make it his.'

'But, Mr. Gotham'—her handsome face was flushed as she turned it to him—'how can I? I have no money—that is to say, of course I shall have my mother's money some day; but my father is trustee, and my guardian, and would not let me have the sum for the purpose. Nothing would please me better than to give this surprise and gratification to a kind, good man. But it is not of any use proposing it to my father; he would not hear of it; he would cover me with ridicule, jeer at the suggestion, and dismiss it.'

'But I suppose that, when of age, you can claim your money to do with it what you will?'

'I do not know. I am of age next month; but it does not follow that I shall get my money if I ask for it. I am not going to have a lawsuit with my father for it.'

'I will make a suggestion, Josephine,' said the old man, still working his stick, and working it faster. 'I have money at my disposal which I am ready to lend you for this purpose. You shall borrow it of me, giving me an acknowledgment, and you shall buy Richard a ship. There is a new and beautiful little cutter being built by Messrs. Grimes and Newbold. She is very nearly ready for sea. What do you say to buying her and fitting her up with everything necessary, and presenting her to Richard Cable?'

'My father will never allow it.' Josephine's face was burning, her dark eyes sparkling.

'Do not say a word about it to him. The arrangement is between you and me. I think with you that some fitting acknowledgment should be made to Richard. He was right to refuse ten pounds. The world will cry shame on your father and you unless something be done for your preserver. Do not

bring me in. I lend you the money; I do nothing more. I am ignorant of the purpose for which you borrow it—it is a business transaction.'

'But——' Josephine hesitated. She was pleased with the idea, yet something in her cautioned her not to close with the proposal. 'But, Mr. Gotham'—she coloured deeply—'will not people consider it odd? Will it not give occasion to talk?'

'People will suppose your father has in this way recompensed Cable. They need not know that he has nothing to do with it, any more than they need know that I have helped in the matter. The talk will be that Mr. Justin Cornellis has done the right thing, and done it handsomely. Do not let it get wind that he offered ten pounds; that would make talk, and talk not pleasant to hear. Folk would say he valued you cheaply. You shall buy the boat of Messrs. Grimes and Newbold, and name her.'

'What shall she be named—the Bessie?'

'The Bessie!' Mr. Gotham shrank back. 'No—on no account—the Josephine.'

CHAPTER X.

JACOB'S LADDER.

'You have been a long time at the Hall,' said Mr. Cornellis, when his daughter returned with a heightened colour.

'Have I? I did not know I had been absent any considerable time.'

'The hour and a half must have passed very agreeably. You do not usually find the society of that old imbecile entertaining; nor he yours sufficiently pleasant to make him care to detain you. Perhaps,' he added with a sneer, 'you have been elsewhere.'

'I have not been elsewhere, papa.'

'And pray, what has kept you all this while?'

'We have been talking.'

'Does he want me to play billiards with him?'

Josephine considered a moment, then laughed, and said: 'Really, papa, I do not know. I forget. If he told me, I do not remember.'

'Your conversation must have been mightily engrossing if you cannot recall an answer to a message. What was it about?'

'You desire me to tell you?'

'O no,' answered Mr. Cornellis in his cold, contemptuous tone. 'If I were to insist, and you were indisposed to comply, you would tell me lies.'

Josephine's cheeks flushed. She had some difficulty in controlling herself sufficiently to say in a subdued tone: 'Do I generally tell you lies, papa?'

'I do not know. I do not care to inquire. I dare say you do, when asked inconvenient questions.'

Josephine walked up and down the room. 'Why, papa, do you always imagine evil of me, and—of everyone? It is enough to make one bad. Is the world full of nothing but swindlers and liars and hypocrites?'

'Angels do not tenant earth here.'

'Nor devils either.'

'Perhaps not—a generation which is a mixture of both; but the gravitation is downwards. Did you ever hear of any one flying off into angel-tenanted space? No, my dear; we keep our feet planted on the earth, and are insensible to centrifugal action, but alive to that which is centripetal.'

'Papa, do you remember that man on the pier at Walton with an apparatus by means of which he pretended he could see through a brick?'

'What of that?'

'He did nothing of the sort. You explained it as an optical deception, contrived by a series of mirrors hid in the apparatus. Those who peered through the spyglass thought they saw through a brick, but they did nothing of the kind.'

'Right: it was a deception.'

'Well, I believe you are equally deceived when you assert that you see through every one you come across.'

Mr. Cornellis bit his lip. He turned testily to his daughter and said: 'You need not pace the room as if you were still striding the deck of the lightship.'

She desisted at once, and left the room. She went out of the house, through the garden gate, upon the seawall, and walked there. The tide was out; a wide expanse of mud showed, and the mud exhaled its usual unsavoury steam. Gulls made a clatter over it, collecting food; a heron rushed up and flew away as Josephine approached where it fed. The tears were in her eyes. She was hurt by her father's remark that she would answer him with lies.

She knew his ways of thinking and speaking; she had rebelled occasionally heretofore; her conscience had acquired fresh sensitiveness of late, and she shook off his ugly scepticism, as false to human nature. She had seen a true man, had met with genuine unselfish love, and had felt the charm it exercised. She began to suspect that there was a poetry and picturesqueness and music in the moral sphere as well as in mere external nature. She had been taught by her father, or had gathered from his conversation, scorn for the weaknesses of humanity, and now, with genuine surprise, perceived that there was infinite pathos and beauty in those very weaknesses.

The willows were quivering in the light wind, the leaves slenderly attached to the stem fluttered and flickered with a breath—their vibration exposed their silver lining. At one moment the trees stood dark against the sky, then a feeble puff sweeping over the mud-flat, brushed up the leaves, and converted the whole tree into a tree of snow exquisitely beautiful, a very tree for fairyland. Josephine did not walk up and down the seawall, lest she should seem to be pacing a deck; she felt in her heart her father's sneer. Accordingly, instead of pacing to and fro, she walked along

it, and came, unintentionally, to the willows and the dike, and looked into Cable's garden. Thence she heard children's voices. She went to the bridge, crossed the water, and entered the garden. She was drawn on by an invincible attraction. She saw a ladder set against the side of the house, a short ladder, for the cottage was but one storey high, and Richard Cable was above the ladder on the roof, pruning the vine. He had his foot on the topmost rung, but rested his body on the trellis; and as he lopped off a young shoot with leaves and tendrils, he stooped with it to his little Mary, who sat just below her father's foot on a lower bar; and she stooped and handed the cluster of leaves to Effie, who sat a stage lower; Effie handed it to her twin-sister, and Jane to Martha, and she to Lettice, and Lettice to Susie, and at the bottom sat Mrs. Cable with the baby, and insisted on the tiny hands receiving the cool beautiful leaves from the little sister. The pretty children were thus on steps of the ladder one above the other, with the evening sun on their shining golden heads and white pinafores, and their smiling faces and dancing blue eyes.

Presently, Cable called for some tying bast, and the baby was made to hold it to Susie, who received it and raised her arms over her

head, when Lettice bowed and took the bast and passed it in like manner above her head to Martha, who in similar style delivered the bast to Jane, and so to Effie, and Effie likewise to Mary, and Mary to her father. The children were seated as masons on a ladder, when loading a scaffold.

Josephine stood where she had crossed, looking at the picture. It strangely moved her, it was so beautiful a picture of peaceful happiness. She did not know whether she had been observed. She hoped that she had been unobserved, and drew back. She would not break the happy chain, disturb the simple pleasure, by her appearance. She went back over the plank to the farther side of the moat, where were the willows, and walked on.

She felt very lonely, more so, after having witnessed this simple domestic interlude, than before. She thought of her father. What would have been his remark on what she had witnessed? The thought of him took the poetry out of the scene. She seated herself on the wall, built of chalk blocks brought from Kent by sea. Southernwood sprouted from the chinks, and fescue-grass; and sea-lettuce, now vividly green, pushed up its juicy fronds. She pulled some blades of grass and bit the wiry stems. She contrasted her life

with that of Cable. His was direct, real, and transparent. Hers was twisted, artificial, and clouded. There was not a spark of sincerity in it. Her whole course of education had been directed towards making her false. She had been taught accomplishments, not because, in music, in history, in knowledge generally, there was anything worth pursuit, but because it was necessary for her to be acquainted with sufficient to fill her place in conversation without exposing ignorance. She took a sprig of white southernwood between her hands and rubbed it, and was suffused with the strong odour from the bruised leaves.

The tide was running in along a channel between the seawall and the mudbanks, sweeping along with it fragments of seatangle, little green crabs, and various small shells. She pulled off her stockings and shoes and put her foot down into the running fresh water. She still bit the fescue-grass, musingly, looking into the tide as it curled about her delicate foot. It was a pleasure to be alone, and free to do as she liked; to sit, if she chose, with one foot in the water instead of two. She was startled to hear a step behind her. She looked round, pulled the grass out of her mouth, and drew up her foot.

Richard Cable was there. 'Miss Corn-

ellis, I saw you pass our gate. As you did not come to us, I have come to you.'

'O Mr. Cable!'—she always called him Mr. to his face, only 'Dicky' when speaking of him to her father—'I did not like to interrupt you whilst you were pruning your vine.'

'I was giving my pets a lesson,' he said.

'A lesson! Of what sort?'

'A double lesson—to take their several seats and sit there content; and to form a part of the great chain of life, each assisting and assisted by the other.'

'What!' exclaimed Josephine, with a tinge of her father's sarcasm in her tone. 'Delivering a moral lecture to the infants!'

'No,' he answered.—'May I stay here a moment by you, miss? I said nothing to them. They take in these ideas naturally. Did you see how they were, all of them, dear mites! on the ladder, and me at top, passing things up and down? It is not necessary for me to give a lecture on it. They couldn't understand it now if I did; but afterwards, when each takes her place in the social scale, she'll maybe remember how she sat on the ladder, and will pass good things down to those below, and also hand up what is due to those above. It is a picture of life, miss.'

'You are a moralist, Mr. Cable.'

'I don't know that, Miss Cornellis; but I have time to think aboard my ship, and turn things about in my head, and so I see much that escapes others who are in active work and have no leisure for considering. In autumn, when the grapes are ripe, I shall be on the trellis again, and all the children on the ladder. Then I shall pass down the bunches; and the first bunch Mary will deliver to Effie, and Effie to Jane, and so down to baby, and not one of them will touch a grape. Then the next will go down like to Susie, untasted by all those above, and the third to Lettice, and the fourth to Martha, and the seventh and last to Mary. I need not give a word of teaching about it; they learn of themselves that the strong and the older, and those high up, must stoop to help the weak and the young and the lowly. It comes of itself, without words.'

'I do not know that your picture is a true parable,' said Josephine rather bitterly. 'I think that on the ladder of life we are all plundering the grapes and upsetting each other, to secure our seats and the first touch of the clusters.'

'The children will not do that; they see their father above them.' Then Richard Cable said in a lower tone, with great gentleness in

his voice: 'Excuse me, Miss Cornellis; I came to you now because, whilst I was up the ladder about the vine, I saw at one moment all the seven pairs of blue eyes looking up to me—and then I thought of something you had said aboard the stranded boat, and I came down after you to tell you about it, for what you said troubled me.'

'What was that?' asked Josephine.

'Do you remember saying that you had no trust, no faith; nothing and no one to look up to?'

'I may have said it. I do not remember.'

'I do. It hurt me to think it was possible; and when I saw all the little eyes on the ladder looking up to their father—I thought of a pair of brown eyes that were not uplifted. Excuse me, miss.' He stood up, and without another word walked away along the seawall.

Then Josephine let down her foot again into the water and stirred it in the transparent stream, and thought. Her face was grave, and the muscles about her mouth worked, and every now and then twitched convulsively. She sat on till the tide, rising higher, drove her from where she sat; then she put on her stockings and shoes again, and walked slowly along the seawall homewards. As she passed the garden of the Cables she looked into it

without stopping. The children, Richard, were no longer there. The shadows of the great willows fell athwart the garden, cool and gray. She went on to her own home, and in and to her own room. There she saw her jacket thrown on the bed; her soap, which after she had last washed her hands, had slipped off the marble top of her stand, lay on the floor where it had fallen. Her comb was on the pincushion, her brush in the window, one of her walking-boots on the hearthrug, the other on a chair. She was angry, and went to the bell to summon the maid and scold her for neglect. But it occurred to her, as she had her hand on the rope, that her father was expecting company to dinner. The household was not large, and the few servants were required to bestir themselves and make a show. Anne was cleaning the plate; she was parlour-maid, lady's-maid, and butler all in one. Anne must lay the cloth, have the silver and glass in excellent order, answer the door, dress the table with flowers, and bring in dinner. How could she also attend to Josephine's room?

'On the ladder, on occasion, we must stoop and help each other,' said Josephine, letting go the bell-pull, half pouting, half smiling, and bending to gather up the fallen piece of

almond curd soap. 'I know what I will do —I will do more on the ladder. I will go down and arrange the flowers in the glasses for the table.'

Whilst she was thus engaged, her father came into the dining-room.

'Papa,' she said, 'will you, or shall I, decant the wine?'

'I will do it. We must not have the cheapest. The rector pretends to know good from bad; but he is an impostor. His son, who is in the army, may have a more cultivated taste, and detect rubbish, so we must have some decent wine for him.'

'Is any one else coming?'

'The rector's wife—that is all. I do not want a large party to-night. Dress becomingly, and show your best manners. When I bring out my inferior wines, you may wear what you like, and be rude. Behave yourself to-night; lay yourself out to please.'

'To please whom? The rector?'

'No; his son, Captain Sellwood.'

'And pray, papa, why should I make an effort to please him?'

'Because I always thought he admired you. He is heir to a good fortune; and it is important that you should not let him slip through your fingers.'

Josephine's brow reddened, and her eyes sparkled with an angry light.

Mr. Cornellis looked coldly at her, and said: 'Do not put on stage attitudes and attempt heroics. I have invited the family here solely on your account. If you do not provide for yourself, I will not provide for you.'

'I have no particular eagerness to fish for husbands; I have no taste for that sport.'

'It is high time, Josephine, that you should understand your position. I am nearly at the end of my means.'

'There is my mother's fortune,' said the girl with a shrug of the shoulder and a toss of her head.

'Dissipated, my dear.'

'How dissipated? It is mine.'

'I was left trustee with full power to expend what was necessary on your maintenance and education.'

'That has not exhausted it.'

'It matters not how it is gone—gone it is.'

'Then,' said Josephine bitterly, 'you misstated the situation, papa, by the use of a wrong possessive pronoun, when you said that you were nearly at the end of your means; you should have said you had come to the end of *my* means.'

'I am not going to excuse myself to you,' Mr. Cornellis said. 'Your education, dress, and caprices have cost much money. The little fortune your mother left——'

'Papa,' exclaimed Josephine, 'I always heard that my mother was well off.'

'Then you heard wrong. Her relations were displeased with her for marrying me, and she got nothing but what could not be kept from her. A good deal of that went before she died.'

'Not all—there is surely the principal.'

'The principal has been going like old stilton. There is not much left; and before it is known that you are portionless, you must secure a husband.'

'Under false pretences?'

'You would not blurt out to everyone that we are on the eve of a financial collapse? I am not going to argue with you. A woman is usually keen-witted in such matters.' He left the room with quick steps to get the wine.

Josephine had been arranging white lilacs and forget-me-nots in a little opal glass vase. Her hand trembled so that she shook out the flowers, and they fell on the white cloth. She tried to pick them up and put them in, but could not do so; and as Anne then entered,

she held out the flowers and vessel to the girl, and, with averted face, said: 'Finish doing this for me, Anne.' Then she ran upstairs. Her cheeks were burning, her eyes hot, her temples throbbing. She was angry as well as distressed. Her father had robbed her, and had acknowledged it with effrontery. Not only so, but he told her this coolly just as company were expected to dinner. She must bury her wrath and humiliation in her heart, and appear with a smiling face, affect a careless spirit, and use her efforts to entrap a man into an engagement, letting him believe her to be the mistress of a handsome fortune.

She leaned her elbows on the window-sill and looked over the garden out to sea. The tide was in, the bay was full of blue water. The sun had set, a still, sweet evening closed in the day. She saw a flight of white and brown winged fishing-boats coming in with the wind and tide. The sailors were returning to their homes with their spoils, to spend a quiet Sunday with their wives and children and parents; they were returning with light consciences; they had earned the bread for all the mouths that depended on them. It was otherwise in Rose Cottage. There, thought Josephine, the father, instead of laying by for

his child, has wasted her fortune, and then bids her go forth and fish for herself with the net of fraud.

Her chin rested in her hands; her brows were knit; her lips quivered. No tears came into her eyes. 'Was there ever,' she said, 'a more miserable, forlorn girl than I? What I said to Richard Cable is true. I have no one to whom I can look up. My ladder is lost in cloud.'

CHAPTER XI

THE SELLWOODS.

Mr. Cornellis could make himself an agreeable host, and he took pains that evening to make it pass pleasantly to his guests. The rector was a florid man, a gentleman of good family, easy-going, generous, never harsh in judging anyone, perhaps too ready to make allowances for the shortcomings of his parishioners. He, like Mr. Cornellis, knew the weaknesses of human nature, but made a different use of his knowledge. When his gardener had been detected selling his pears and grapes to a fruiterer at Walton, he shrugged his shoulders and said it was human nature, lectured him, but did not dismiss him. When he heard that some of his Sunday-school teachers had got into moral scrapes, he said: 'It is human nature; we must find substitutes;' and when Mrs. Sellwood showed him lumps of alum in the bread, he laughed, and said: 'Millers and bakers are human beings!'

and would not take away his custom. On Christmas Day, his clerk was tipsy, and put in his Amens wrong. 'After all,' said the rector, 'it is human nature to rejoice on this day: we will pass it over.'

His son, Captain Sellwood, was home from India, a handsome, ox-eyed man, with light hair, but dark eyelashes, a man with an inexpressive face and solemn inscrutable eyes. He was not a man of words. He sat listening to conversation, twiddling his moustache and sharpening it to needle-points, with his great gloomy eyes on the speakers, moving them from one to the other as they interchanged talk, but saying nothing himself. Some considered him stupid. This was not the case; he had plenty of intelligence, but he was not a talker. Ladies condescended to him, and tried to draw him out on the subject of India; but though he could speak on Indian topics, he felt that he was condescended to when India was brought on the carpet, and he left India lying there.

He felt keenly his inability to sparkle in society; the consciousness came on him in spasms. When such a spasm of consciousness came on, he uncrossed his legs and put the right leg over the left; at the next spasm, he put the left leg over the right. Some

people, as already said, declared that Captain Sellwood's silence arose from stupidity; others said, from liver; others, again—and these were in the right—that his father had talked him down. The rector was a ready man in conversation, and fond of hearing his own voice. At his own table he monopolised the conversation, and this had affected the captain when he was a boy, and had made of him a listener, not a speaker. He had a wondering admiration for light badinage and small joking, for he was wholly incompetent to attain to sportiveness.

Mr. Cornellis took in Mrs. Sellwood; and the rector gave his arm to Aunt Judith; therefore, Josephine fell to the captain. She screwed up her mouth. She was not pleased, both because he was a dull partner and she was not in a humour to talk; but also, and chiefly, because she knew her father's intentions, and her spirit rose in rebellion against him and his schemes.

'It is with dining as with virtue,' said Mr. Cornellis. 'We should love eating as we love virtue, for its own sake, not for what it may advantage us.—You will have sauterne with your fish, captain—tell me your opinion of it. I flatter myself it is good.' Captain Sellwood bowed and said, 'Very nice,' but in such a

toneless way that Cornellis was unable to discover what his real opinion was. Cornellis always made much of his wines, talked of their age, bouquet, and brand, as if he had a first-rate cellar; whereas he had no cellar at all, only a cupboard in the coal-hole where he kept a few dozen, and got his wine in as he wanted it. But by talking about his wine, and telling stories concerning the way in which he picked up this lot and that lot at sales or from old friends, he had acquired the credit of being not only a connoisseur, but of giving first-rate wine at his table.

The sauterne on this occasion was good. It was not always so; but this evening Cornellis did his utmost to catch the captain for his daughter, and did not withhold his best either in eating or in drinking. He used to say that Zriny, Ban of Croatia, when he went against the Turks, put purses full of gold under his belt, so that if he fell, the enemy might hold his body in esteem; thus would all the world esteem the man who put good dinners under his waistcoat. The rector and his son would hardly suspect their host to be on the verge of bankruptcy when he gave them so excellent a repast.

But the captain, though he liked a good dinner, was not a man to lay store by it, and,

perhaps, after the spiced dishes of India, he preferred plain English roast and boiled joints to any entremets, however delicate. He would have preferred a seat opposite Josephine, where he could have looked at her, instead of a place at her side, where he was obliged to talk to her. His observations came at intervals, and had no connection with each other. He said something about the weather, then was silent; and after ten minutes, asked Josephine if she painted now; when she said that she did not, he fidgeted with his napkin, wiped his moustache, listened to what his father and Miss Judith were talking about, and then inquired whether Josephine's aunt had been well during the preceding winter.

The jovial rector was in full flow of talk about parish matters. 'I've no right to be here,' he said; 'I ought to be in prison with hard labour for a month. Instead of improving my parishioners, I demoralise them. What do you think is my last experience? I parcelled out my glebe so that some of the labourers might have fields and keep cows. I thought it hard that they should not have something to supplement their earnings on the farm. I even lent a couple of them money to buy cows. John Harvey was one, and he has got a month for it now.'

'How so, rector?'

'Because he has been stealing mangold and turnips through the winter to feed his cow with, from Farmer Barons, with whom he worked. Barons thought his mangold was going, and so set a policeman to watch; then Harvey was caught. He argued that his cow must not starve, and that he had not the land or capital to till rootcrops for her, and that I was to blame for letting him have the cow. He was once an honest man; I had converted him, with the best intentions, into a thief.'

'He is let off pretty easy,' said Aunt Judith.

'That is not all. The farmers who employed the other men that have cows have given them notice to leave their service, so they will be thrown out of situations and lay the blame on me.'

'Is it not usually the case,' said Josephine, 'that when we seek to do good we blunder into mischief? Therefore, it is best to let men go their own wretched way for themselves.'

Captain Sellwood turned and looked at the girl fixedly; his great eyes said nothing, but he wondered in his heart that one so young should speak with such want of feeling.

'I don't agree with you, Miss Josephine,' said the rector. 'It is human to err. We do

not see things from all sides at once, and so we make mistakes. Some suffer; but we learn lessons, and correct our mistakes.'

'We should try our experiments on ourselves, not on others,' said Josephine. 'You have been practising on the peasant, and the result is that the peasant has to suffer, not you.'

'I beg your pardon; I suffer also. I shall not see back the twenty pounds I lent for the cow.'

'It seems to me that you good people are always making plans for the bettering of others, and all your plans when carried out aggravate the evil. Leave the poor and suffering alone, to work out their problems for themselves.'

The great ox eyes of the captain were again on Josephine, and they annoyed her. She was determined, if possible, to bring some life into them, so she said: 'I believe in living only for self. Every animal does it. Why not we? We involve ourselves in a tangle when we begin to consider others, and get no thanks for our pains. Let us all fight our own way, and slap each other in the face if he persists in encumbering our path. I want help from no one, and will give no help to any one.'

'My dear Josephine,' said her father in a tone of sad reproach, but with eyes that expressed anger, 'you are talking at random.'

'Not a bit. I have well considered the law of existence. That is my law, simple, straightforward and successful, like, yes, like the way of the sea-nettle in the tide.'

'I do not think, my dear,' said the rector, 'that it is a way that will draw after it a wake of love and light.'

'I speak what I think and feel,' said Josephine, disregarding her father's warning glances, encouraged by perceiving some expression in the ox eyes of the captain, like a cat's-paw of wind in a quarry pool.

'No, my dear,' said the rector, with a cheery smile on his red face; 'I won't allow that you feel and think this, though you say it. Neither will I admit for a moment your likening yourself to a sea-nettle. To a cactus, if you choose—that has on it needles. A girl sometimes puts forth a bristle of sharp and piquant speeches; but it is not human nature, any more than it is cactus nature to produce only stings—the flower bursts out in the end, large, glorious, beautiful, and we forget all about the bristles as we stand over and admire the flower.'

Josephine went on maliciously: 'Mrs. Sell-

wood has been most kind to that boy Joe Cudmore.'

'Yes; he is crippled with rheumatism, and bedridden.'

'She has spent hours in the dirty cottage and the insufferable stuffiness of the sickroom teaching the boy to read.'

'Well—yes,' said the rector. 'It was so sad to see the poor fellow confined to his bed with nothing to relieve the tedium.'

'And—with what result?'

'He can read.'

'Exactly. I was in the cottage the other day. We wanted the mother to come and char for us, and I found him devouring the police intelligence. You have roused in him a hunger for criminal biography.'

'He reads his Bible too.'

'I saw his Bible; you gave him one, with red edges, and the edges stuck together. It had not been read. What chance has the story of Abraham against that of Rush who murdered a household? That boy longs to recover the use of his limbs that he may emulate the glorious deeds of burglars, or at least of pickpockets.'

'You paint things in extreme colours,' said the rector, a little discouraged.

'And the schools,' continued Josephine—

'I know how enthusiastic you are about them. The education given there has unfitted all the young people for the work required of them, or has given them a distaste for it. The farmers complain that of the rising generation not one lad understands hedging; and their wives, that the girls will have nothing to do with milking cows and making butter.'

'I remember,' said the rector, in an apologetic tone—he was unable to deny that there was truth in Josephine's words—'I remember some years ago there was not a man or woman in my congregation who could use the Prayer-book and Hymnal.'

'And now,' said Josephine, 'that they can use them, they value them so little that the fires in the stove are lighted with the torn pages out of them; and the road between the school and church is scattered with dishevelled sacred literature.'

Then the captain said: 'Am I to understand that you think no attempt should be made to do any good to any one?'

'To any one except ourselves—yes,' answered Josephine.

'You would in India allow suttees to continue, and Juggernaut's car to roll on and crush bones for ever unobstructed?'

'Why not? Is not India becoming over-

peopled, and the problem springing up, what is to be done with the overflow of population?'

'I think,' said Mr. Cornellis with suppressed wrath, 'I will ask you, rector, to return thanks.'

'No,' said the rector; 'I am not going to say grace on such a sentiment. My dear Miss Josephine, we must not shirk a duty because it opens the door to a problem. It is the very fact that we are meeting problems which duty insists on our solving, that gives a zest and purpose to life. We make our blunders—well, that is inevitable; it is human to err; and our sons profit by our experience and avoid our mistakes. A child makes pothooks before it draws straight lines, and strums discords before it finds the way to harmonies. We must set an ideal before us, and aim for that; we may go wrong ways to work, but with a right heart; that will excuse our errors. Now, I will say grace, if you like.'

When the ladies were in the drawing-room, Mrs. Sellwood took a low chair before the fire, and in two minutes was asleep. The rector's wife was an excellent woman, who rose every morning at five, made her own fire, did her accounts, read the lessons for the day, and gardened, before the maid servants appeared. But it is not possible for the most

energetic person to burn the candle at both ends with impunity, and she made up for her wakefulness in the morning by sleepiness at night, and invariably dozed off after dinner, wherever she was. This was so well known by her hosts that she was generally allowed to go off quietly to sleep and have her nap before the gentlemen came from their wine.

Aunt Judith made no attempt to keep her guest awake; when she saw her nodding, she drew Josephine into the conservatory, and said: 'My dear, how came you to speak as you did at table? You frightened the captain, and shocked his father.'

'I am glad I produced some effect on the former, who seems to me to have inherited his mother's somnolence.'

'But, Josephine, you know that Captain Algernon Sellwood has long been your admirer, and you are doing your best to drive him away.'

'Let him go. I shall breathe freely when he withdraws his great dreamy eyes from me.'

'My dear niece, I must be serious with you. He is a man worth having; he will have about fifteen thousand a year on the death of his aunt, Miss Otterbourne. He is a fine man, and belongs to a family of position. You could not expect to do better than take him.

I speak now as your aunt, full of interest in your welfare. I must remark that your extraordinary and repellent manner this evening is not one to attract him to your feet. You are trifling with your opportunities, and before you are aware, you will be left an old maid.'

'I do not care. An old maid can go her own way, and a married woman cannot.'

'No, my dear; an old maid cannot go her own way, unless she has a fortune at her disposal. Can I? I am helpless, bound to helplessness. I do not follow a husband; I have to follow your father. Remember, you have not a fortune. Your father has told you that misfortunes have fallen on us, and your money is gone. Have you made up your mind not to take Algernon Sellwood, if he offers?'

'I don't know; I have not thought about it.'

'Do not take the matter so lightly. I am seriously alarmed about you—so is your father. Sooner or later, we shall have to give up our establishment, and disappear into some smaller place, and cut our expenses down to a low figure. It is not pleasant to have to pinch and clip. What stands in your way? You have never shown yourself so perverse before. Upon my word, I believe your head has been

turned ever since that unfortunate affair of the lightship and Cable.'

'Do not mention him,' said Josephine abruptly.

'Who? Algernon Sellwood?'

'No; the other, Richard Cable.'

'Why not?'

'Because when you do, I see what a man ought to be, and the captain pales into nothing before him. Whether Algernon Sellwood has brains and heart, I do not know; he is to me a doll that rolls its eyes, not a man with a soul.'

'For heaven's sake!' gasped poor Aunt Judith, 'what do you mean, Josephine? Gracious powers! you do not hint at such a preposterous folly as that——'

'As that, what? Speak out!'

'As that—— I really cannot speak it.'

'As that I have lost my heart to Richard Cable, the lightshipman, the widower, father of seven little children? No; I have not. Now, are you satisfied? I am not such a fool as you take me for.'

Aunt Judith drew a long breath. 'It would be impossible for you to marry beneath you—and to such a man!'

'Beneath me!—Above me. We are all being dragged down. It is my fate never to

have one to whom I can look up, whom I can call my own.—There come the gentlemen.'

As she and Aunt Judith entered the drawing-room through the French window, Mrs. Sellwood woke up, was wide-awake, and said: 'Yes—buttered eggs! I said so, Miss Cornellis—buttered eggs!'

'Been asleep, dear?' asked the rector, tapping his wife on the shoulder.

'No, Robert. I have been talking to Miss Cornellis about buttered eggs.'

'Not even closed your eyes?'

'I may have *closed* them to consider better, but I have *not* been asleep. I have been giving a receipt for buttered eggs.'

CHAPTER XII.

AN INDISCRETION.

When the guests were gone, Aunt Judith retired. She was sleepy. She had eaten a good dinner, and eaten heartily, and wanted her rest after it.

'You are going to bed?' said she in the door to her niece.

'Eventually,' answered Josephine. 'I must play some good music on the piano first, to dissipate the reminiscence of Strauss and Waldteufel I have been strumming.'

'Why did you not play good music?'

'Because good music is desecrated if played to those who don't listen, don't value it, and prefer what is bad.'

Aunt Judith yawned, said nothing in reply, and withdrew.

Josephine went to the window and threw it open. The room was warm and close. One window unfolded upon the garden; the other at right angles into the conservatory.

She opened the garden window and stepped out to inhale the fresh air; then, fearful of catching cold, as the dew might be falling, and she had on a low dress, she went in again, and stood in the window, leaning against the side, looking out. She rested the elbow of her right arm in the palm of her left, and held her chin, with the forefinger extended on her cheek. She was in a pretty rose silk dress, with lace about the neck, and short sleeves. The hue suited her admirably; she had looked very pretty that evening, especially when her colour came and her eyes flashed with excitement during her passage of arms with the rector. In her hair was a sprig of azalea, now faded, Madame van Cruyzen, a crimson azalea; and another sprig was in her bosom.

Aunt Judith, a frugal woman, had extinguished all the lights in the drawing-room, except those on the piano, which she left because her niece wished to play, and a little lamp in the conservatory, which she forgot. This latter was placed among ferns, and was of red glass, so that it diffused a warm glow over the plants.

Josephine did not care to play from notes, so she blew out the candles before she went to the window. The moon was shining; just over the top of the palings at the bottom of

the garden could be seen the sea, a quivering sheet of silver, under the moon; the evening was light, so light that there seemed no blackness in the shadows, only deep blue; the sky was blue, the trees blue, the bushes blue, the moonlight bluish. It may have been the contrast to the red light in the conservatory that gave Josephine this impression, the contrast of coolness of colour also to her own warm tints of dress.

She thought of Captain Sellwood. She had known him as a child, before he went to India; and had seen him since, when he returned on leave. He had hung about her whenever he came home; she knew that he liked her, and yet he never got far in showing his liking. She remembered once making her father laugh by calling him the 'Morbid Fly.' She had meant that he clung about, was half asleep, a little troublesome and not very interesting. She had used the expression when she was much younger and did not know the meaning of words. She had intended to call him torpid. Ever after, he had gone in the house by the name of the Morbid Fly.

She knew that he was more gifted than he seemed. His fellow-officers spoke highly of him. He had done well in his examinations before going out, so that he could not be

deficient in brain; but he was not an interesting man. As the Frenchman said of Truth: it is so precious, 'il faut la bien économiser;' so might Captain Sellwood have said of his wits; he husbanded them so jealously that many doubted if he possessed any. That he was an honourable man, Josephine could not doubt. The rector was so high-principled, and sound at core, that a son of his could hardly fail to inherit something of his good quality. On occasion, he had shown that there was energy in him, but only on occasion. All good qualities were in him, as heat and its correlative light are in a stick or a piece of lump-sugar—latent, only to be made manifest by friction. There are blaze and bang in a percussion cap, but they are developed only by a blow; and when not beaten, a percussion cap is an uninteresting object, deficient in self-assertion.

'Really,' said Josephine, 'I do not want a husband who will be invaluable in emergencies, and a cypher at all other times. Besides, I am not so sure that he would do and say the right thing when roused. It is a weakness of such persons often to do just what is not apropos, and, like his mother, say buttered eggs, when no one is thinking about such things.'

She stepped to the piano and closed it; she would not play any more that night. It might disturb her father and aunt.

She would go out into the pavilion, a small summer-house in the garden, on raised ground that commanded a sea-view; in it she could sit, get cool, and perhaps sleepy. It was of no use her going to bed now; she was far too excited to sleep. Had she spoken her own opinions in her controversy with the rector? She had no opinions. Her moral sense, her views of life, were inchoate. She had merely repeated what she had heard fall from her father, opinions which her mind received without consenting to them, or rejecting them. She had measured arms with the rector out of perversity, because she knew that her father wished her to gain the old parson's good opinion, and because she owed her father a grudge for having wasted her property. That she was cutting off her own nose to spite herself she was aware, but indifferent to the consequences. That she would meet with angry rebuke, and sneers worse to bear than rebuke, from her father, she also knew, and did not care. She was in that condition of soul most dangerous in a young person, a spiritual condition analogous to that of one who in a dark room has lost all his

bearings, does not know where door or window or table or wardrobe is; who beats about with the hands, moves this way, then that, and at last goes forward desperately, knowing that a blow or a fall must ensue, and give the proper bearings of the room. Josephine's mind was in confusion; she hardly could distinguish between right and wrong, and she was perfectly incapable of judging what was her proper course.

She did not care about her fortune that was squandered, because she had made no scheme, built up no hopes on the future when she would be her own mistress. She had one passion—for music, and at one time she thought of going on the stage; so she would escape from home; but she doubted whether she had the perseverance to pass through the drudgery of apprenticeship for the opera; and it was to the opera she turned, with her musical ear and splendid voice.

There had been long simmering in her heart indignation against her father, and impatience with Aunt Judith; and now this boiled over. The baseness of her father had never seemed to her so odious as since she had made the acquaintance of Richard Cable, nor the supineness of her aunt less inexcusable. Her rebellious temper impelled her to

no positive line of action ; it made her disposed to quarrel with every one who came in her way, and oppose everything that was suggested to her. In nervous disorders the patient is irritable, and almost insufferable to his nurses ; and Josephine was spiritually ill ; her moral tissue was in a state of angry excitation. We are her nurses sitting round her, reading her mind, with our fingers on her pulse, counting its furious throbbing. We must be patient with her, and not angry because she seems to us unreasonable. The moral sickness must be borne with as tenderly as the sickness that is physical. Have we not ourselves had our periods of ethical giddiness, when everything swam round us and the ground gave way under our feet ? When we put out our hands grasping in vacuum we caught at things that could not stay us up.

Or to vary the simile somewhat, may we not consider our span of life as a tight-rope on which we have to dance our hour ? We can do it with the balance-pole in our hands that we are supplied with—a balance-pole of some sort or another—moral principle or social etiquette. How we pirouette, and leap and fall and rebound, and trip and spin on tiptoe, with a smiling face ! We have our pole. And what pranks we play with that same

pole! Now we bear it horizontally, and then all the lookers-on know we are safe. Anon we balance it on our noses, and folding our arms across the breast caper a hornpipe; thereat every breath is held, for all expect our fall. Anon we toss the pole from hand to hand, and sway in our dancing precariously: a gasp from the spectators; we have cast our pole from us high into the air. We are lost! No; a somersault is turned on the rope, and the hands grasp the falling pole in time to steady us again. So we go along our rope to the end; and whether we carry our pole off it at the extremity depends on what the balancing-pole has been.

Some acrobats are sent along the rope without any pole at all, to balance themselves as best they may with outstretched arms; and under some nets are spread, which may receive them if they fall; but to others are only the hard stones of the pavement and sharp flints. When these go down they never go aloft to dance again; they cause a talk for a day, and are then forgotten. The broken creatures lie all about us; they can be counted by the scores. We thank God we are not as they; we have our balancing-poles and our receiving-nets, and have not our spasms of supreme agony, when our feet totter, our

heads whirl, and we know we are lost. Not we. We have social etiquette, which can never fail us, which will always restore our equilibrium, always remain in our hands and keep us upright; always, that is, till we reach the end of our cord, and then we throw it away for ever.

As Josephine sat in the summer-house she was quite in the dark. The house was of board, painted, with a conical roof, no window, only a side door. Through this door she looked on the quivering silver belt of the sea. A cloud obscured the moon, but not the rays that fell on the sea, which gained in brilliancy by the obscuration of the moon. She knew that the tide was full. The hour was midnight, and when the tide was at noonday or night then were the highest tides at Hanford. She could hear the lap of the water on the seawall outside the garden palings—a cool, pleasant murmur that soothed her. Without thinking of what she was doing, moved by the sight of the glittering water and the sound of the tide, she began to sing the mermaid's air in *Oberon.* As she sung she thought she heard a sweet whistle repeating the air; she stopped, and the whistle continued it. She flushed in the dark. Richard Cable was without, on the seawall, in the moonlight,

watching the tide, by the garden gate. She sang another verse and stopped, and again the whistle echoed the strain

Then she started up. 'What can have brought him here? He has been thinking about me! I have some crackers for his children; I put the box aside in the conservatory.' She did not stop to consider what she was about; she ran to the house, stepped into the little glass veranda and took the box. Then she also stooped and carefully raised the ruby-globed lamp, and went out into the garden with the box of gilt crackers in one hand and the ruby lamp in the other. She took the lamp partly that she might show Richard the pretty crackers by its light, as the moon was hidden; partly, also, out of a sense of vanity, because she wished him to see her in her rose silk evening dress, and artificial light was necessary to bring out its colour. Another, a third reason, also influenced her, as unacknowledged as her vanity; an instinctive sense of imprudence in going out of the garden gate at midnight to speak to a man, and a fancy that the bearing of a light would modify the imprudence.

Josephine for her trip along the rope of life had been given by her father no balancing-pole whatever, certainly no moral principle.

She walked through the garden, softly singing the mermaid's song, bearing the coloured light; a pretty object, had there been anyone there to see her. The garden gate could be opened by the hand from the inside, but only by a latch-key from without. When she came to it she put the box of crackers under her chin, and held it thus whilst her disengaged hand drew back the latch. Then in a moment she stepped through, and with a merry laugh stood lamp in hand before Cable, and the door closed behind her unregarded. She raised the lamp and let the rosy light fall over her face and hair and bare neck and shoulders.

The boatman took off his cap and stood as one dumb-founded, holding his cap to his breast with both hands, looking at her.

'Are you not surprised to see me, Mr. Cable?'

'Very—miss. I thought I saw a fairy, or a vision.'

'And I,' she said smiling, 'I was surprised too. I sang and heard an echo. I came out to see whence the echo came, and found you. How came you here at this time of night?'

'Well, miss,' answered Cable deferentially, 'I am up so much of nights when aboard the lightship, looking after my lamp;

and now that I am ashore, I can't always sleep; and this being a beautiful night and the tide flowing full, I thought I'd walk on the wall. But, miss, excuse me, you ought not to be here.'

'Oh, I have only come to give you this box of gilt crackers—it will amuse the children. Each contains a trifle—a brooch, or a ring, or an anchor. How they will laugh over them!'

'Yes,' said Cable; 'but I had rather you had not brought them now.'

'I give you them; take them. I must go back.'

'Yes, miss, at once.'

She put her hand to the garden door; it was fast. 'O Mr. Cable!' she exclaimed, as her heart stood still.

'Hush!' He put his finger to his lip.

Both heard voices close at hand, on the seawall. The wall made a bend at the garden paling, so that those approaching from one direction were invisible. On the other side it extended straight forward for a mile.

The moon burst forth in a flood of light. Instinctively Cable and Josephine looked along the wall. No escape was possible in that direction. Seaward also was no escape; the tide was in and washed the base of the dike.

The sailor put his foot against the door; it was too strong to be burst open.

Josephine blew out the light, and then was aware that it was useless for her to do this; she could not be hid. She stood in her evening dress, in the glare of full moon, against the painted, boarded wall, and Cable beside her, exposed to the sight of anyone turning the corner, without possibility of escape, without a place where she could hide.

Scarce a moment was afforded her to determine what to do, when round the angle came the rector and his son, arm in arm.

'My dear Algernon,' said Parson Sellwood, 'you need not be afraid; she is right at heart. It is human nature to be perverse.'

Then, all at once, the two gentlemen saw those before them.

'My dear Josephine!' exclaimed the rector. 'Good gracious! what is the meaning of this?'

Josephine looked down, and her voice faltered as she said: 'I came with crackers for the children, and the gate closed—and—and I asked Mr. Cable to take the crackers home to his little ones.'

'The gate fast?' asked the rector. 'Locked out on the wall at midnight. O Josephine!'

In a moment, the captain threw his overcoat that he had on his arm upon the spikes

that incrusted the top of the palings, and laying both his hands on the coat, lifted himself over, and in another minute had opened the door.

'We are inconsiderate,' said Captain Sellwood; 'we must not keep Miss Cornellis standing here making explanations.'

'No,' said the rector, 'inventing explanations.' He clicked his tongue in his mouth. 'What a pity it is you have lost your mother. To a young girl nothing can replace a mother —no, not the best of aunts. Shut the gate. Come on, Algy.' He said nothing to Cable; but as he relinked his arm in that of his son, after a few paces in silence, he muttered: 'No; it won't do. I am sorry. There is good in the girl; but—it won't do, Algernon. Look elsewhere.'

CHAPTER XIII.

BURNT OUT.

JOSEPHINE staggered to the pavilion and threw herself on a bench in its shadow. She must get out of the moonlight, retire among the blackest of shadows to hide her humiliation. What had she done? What would the vicar and his son think of her! What a talk in the place would spring out of this! She could never hold up her head again, never look anyone in the face. Was it possible that the story she had told would be received? Appearances were too strongly against her. For a moment the temptation came on her to open the gate again, run out, and throw herself into the sea.

What a fortunate thing for us if we could see the consequences of our acts before they took place. Then we should never wish to do, certainly never do, foolish things. Judgment comes late, after the act, as thunder follows lightning. We do not hear the growl

till it is too late to recall the flash. Josephine was alive to her indiscretion, now that it was committed, and would have given half the fortune her father had cast away to have had it undone. She was angry with herself for her want of forethought; angry with the children for liking crackers; angry with the vicar for pottering along the wall after midnight; angry with Cable for not jumping over the fence; and with the captain for jumping over it. Cable ought to have had the readiness of wit, at the first sound of the voices, to have relieved her from the situation at the cost of his hands; the captain ought not to have gone over the paling, for by so doing he had let her see that he knew she was there clandestinely, and would be ashamed to go to the front door of the house to ask admission.

Everyone was in fault, but she most of all. She resolved never to speak to Richard Cable again. He was guilty of insolence in echoing her song. She would take no more notice of his odious brats. She would never attempt to do a good-natured act again. It was all good-nature which had precipitated her into this predicament.

She returned slowly to the house without the lamp; she had left that on the table in

the summer-house; that could be fetched to-morrow. She entered the drawing-room and groped for her candle with the matches by it, usually put on a side-table. She would light her candle, then close the shutters, and exclude the moonlight. Her candle was indeed in the usual place, but not the box of lucifers. This was provoking, as she had none in her room; her box there, she remembered, was exhausted. She considered a moment, and resolved to go into the kitchen, or into the pantry, where she was sure to find what she required. She left the room with the window hasped, but not barricaded, and put off her thin shoes, so as to make no noise in the house, lest she should disturb and alarm anyone. She had remained up much later than she had intended. Aunt Judith would be asleep, her father also, at this time.

When she softly opened the door into the hall, it struck her that the air was strongly impregnated with paraffin. A little light came in from the staircase window, and by that she was able to find her way to the pantry. She put down her candle on the hall table and went in, but stepped back at once. The floor was wet. Her feet were moistened; she had trodden in a pool of oil.

'How stupid—how like Anne! She has

upset the can. I must not go in there for matches.'

She stepped towards the kitchen, very lightly, with inaudible tread. There she found fire still smouldering in the grate, and the oven door open, showing that it was filled with sticks. Moreover, there was wood on the hot-plate of the stove.

'How careless cook is! She is drying the kindlers for to-morrow, and has not raked out the fire first.'

She stooped to remove some of the wood which lay on the ground, and which she felt as she walked without her shoes; and again was conscious of the smell of petroleum. She was surprised; but then recalled that she had stepped in the slopped oil in the pantry, and concluded that she smelt what she had brought away with her. Then she put her hand on the mantel-shelf for the lucifers, and found the box. She had left her candlestick in the hall, so she returned to it in the dark, and was about to strike a light, when she thought she heard a sound as of some one stirring in the dining-room. She stood perfectly still, not daring to breathe, listening. Again she heard the noise. There was certainly some one in the room. The first impulse was to cry; but she controlled herself,

and considered what had better be done. The noise might proceed from a cat. She stepped very lightly to the door, which was ajar, touched it, and drove it open sufficiently to admit her, sidelong, and she looked in. The shutters, which had been fastened, were open, and the moonlight flowed into the room. Every trace of dinner had been cleared away from the table, which now had on its usual printed cover.

Josephine saw something, or—was it some one, on the floor, moving? The light through the French window was so clear that she was left in doubt only a moment. She saw a profile against the window-pane and recognised at once her father. He was on his knees, and was creeping about with a can, the oil-can, in his hand. She saw him decanting it on the carpet near the window curtains. He was in his dress suit, as she had last seen him, saying good-bye to his guests.

'Papa,' she said, 'what are you about?'

He started to his feet with an exclamation, either of terror or of surprise.

Josephine stepped fully into the room. 'What is it, papa? Have you lost something?—or—— What are you doing?'

He stood back, against the window curtain, and put his hands behind him, with the

can. The moonlight was strong, and his position was against it, so that his black silhouette was sharp, as if cut out of lamp-blacked paper. She saw the movement of his lips, and his tongue shot out, like a serpent's, then drawn in again. He said nothing.

'Papa, there is a very strong odour of petroleum; have you spilled the oil?'

He replied in a suppressed voice, vibrating with anger: 'What are you doing here? Spying on me, are you?—Yes, I have spilled a little oil here.'

'But why have you brought the can in here?'

'Because,' he answered in the same tone, 'that fool Anne upset the gravy from the roast duck on the carpet, and I am trying to get the grease out.'

'Is not that better done by day, papa?'

'I know best when it is to be done; I must apply the oil before the grease is trodden in.'

'You have no light.'

'Am I a madman to take a candle when I am using paraffin?'

'True, papa; I did not think of that. There is a pool of the oil in the pantry. I suppose you spilled that. It would have been

better, I think, to have left the extraction of the grease till to-morrow.'

'I know what I am about.' She knew by the quiver of his voice that he was angry. 'Get to bed with you, and do not meddle with me.'

She was too much afraid of her father to disobey him. She returned to the hall, struck a match, lit her candle, and then—to her surprise saw a heap of wood, and a number of old newspapers that her father filed in his study, cast beneath the stairs. What was the meaning of this? Why had her father brought his newspapers there, and why had he also placed with them the sticks that had been cut and piled up for dahlia supports? She did not ask him; she went up the stairs to her own room, shut herself in, and undressed. Then the recollection of what had happened to herself returned, and displaced the thoughts of her father's strange proceedings.

When she was in bed, she could not sleep for some time, thinking of what had taken place, and blaming herself for her want of consideration. When at last she did fall into slumber, it was into a feverish, fantastic dream, in which she believed herself to be awake and struggling with sleep. She thought that she was arraigned before court for having stolen gilt

crackers, and that her father wore a wig, and was counsel for the prosecution ; and Richard Cable also wore a wig, and was counsel for the defence ; and that the rector sat as judge ; and under his seat was the captain, looking dreamily at her, with pen in hand, as clerk, waiting to take down the evidence for and against her. On the table stood the ruby lamp, and the entire court was irradiated by it. She was annoyed with the lamp because it diffused so red a glow that it made her look as if she were blushing. Besides, it diffused heat as well as light, and the air in the court became oppressive because of the lamp. Then she asked to have it turned down ; and the captain put his hand to the screw and turned it up so that the flame shot out at the top above the chimney, and the redness in the court seemed to deepen, and the heat to become more intense. The rector's gown, instead of being black, was scarlet, like the habit of a criminal court judge, and his face was as red as his gown. Then he raised his hand and pointed to Josephine, and said : 'She blushes ; she convicts herself ;' and she was conscious of being suffused with colour and shame and anger. She could endure no longer the heat and the glitter of the eyes turned on her in that red light, and she cried out and

started up in bed, and in a moment was aware of a smell of fire, and of unusual heat, and of a crackling sound. She saw a light strike along her floor from under the door, and knew that the house was in flames. She sprang from bed, slipped on her clothes, and opened her door. Then she saw that the lower part of the staircase was in a blaze, that flames were pouring through the doors of the dining-room and the pantry, where the petroleum had been upset. To descend to the hall was impossible.

She ran to her aunt's door, opened it, roused Judith Cornellis, and then hastened to her father. His door was locked. She knocked long at it before he answered; then he was some time before he had lighted a candle, put on his dressing-gown and slippers, and unlocked.

'Papa,' she cried, 'do be quick; the house is in a blaze. We cannot go below. It is all flaming.'

'Indeed. How comes that about?'

'Papa, what is to be done?'

He smoothed his chin, and said: 'The gardener has been trimming the Ayrshire rose, and has left the ladder against the window on the landing. It is quite providential.'

She looked at him in surprise. He took the matter with singular coolness.

'Now,' he said, 'run and rouse the servants. If the backstairs are on fire, we must all escape by the ladder.'

At the same moment a violent hammering at the front door and ringing of the bell were heard. The policeman in going his rounds had observed the fire, and had run up to rouse the house.

In a few minutes the whole of the inmates were awake, and had scrambled into their clothes, and were gathered at the head of the stairs.

'Quick!' said Mr. Cornellis.—'Josephine, Judith! save any of your trinkets and trifles. We must get out as quickly as we can.'

Then a spout of flame rushed up the stairs. The policeman and some one he had called to his aid had made their way in through the conservatory and drawing-room; and on opening the door, the air had fanned the fire into a blaze. Conscious of his mistake, the policeman hastily reclosed the door, went out, and ran round to the back kitchen. The flames were raging there also. The whole of the lower storey, except the drawing-room and study, seemed to be on fire. It was

extraordinary with what rapidity the conflagration had spread.

Mr. Cornellis retained his composure. Miss Judith would have remained collecting the treasures in her bedroom, had not he precipitated her movements by snatching her bundle from her and throwing it out of the window. Then he made her descend the ladder. All were speedily in safety on the grass in the garden, looking up at the burning house. Very little could be saved. A few pieces of furniture from the drawing-room, some pictures of no value, bedding, and the contents of some wardrobes—that was all. The fire gained hold of the house rapidly; the floors of the bedrooms were hot, smouldering, the smoke thick; and there was no fire-engine nearer than nine miles off. Nevertheless, a rider was at once despatched for the engine, which arrived when too late to save anything, but not too late to spoil with the water such things as had been spared by the fire.

Mr. Cornellis flew about in his slippers and dressing-gown. He had not had time to dress himself completely. Indeed, no man could have been more taken by surprise; he had lost everything, except a pair of trousers, slippers, a figured Turkish yellow dressing-

gown, and his shirt. He did not lose his presence of mind. Some place of refuge must be found for his sister and daughter. He considered a moment, and then ran to the Hall and knocked up Mr. Gotham, who, when brought to understand what had taken place, consented to receive the family under his roof. The servants of the Hall were roused; but, indeed, the whole village was awake and out, and the grounds of Rose Cottage and the road and seawall were crowded; the boatmen who appeared were prompt in their offers of assistance, and formed lines to pass buckets of water to the burning house, but desisted when they found that the pailfuls were unavailing; the fire had gained too great a hold on the house. The few goods that had been rescued were carried by them to the Hall, and then they drove their hands into their pockets and stood watching the progress of the flames.

The rector appeared without his hat. He caught sight of Josephine, grasped her wrist, and drew her aside. 'How comes this about?' he asked bluntly.

'The fire! Oh, Mr. Sellwood, how can I tell?'

'Eh? Is it the result of your night-wanderings? After what I saw, I am not

surprised at any act of thoughtlessness. You had a lamp in your hand. What did you do with it?'

'It was extinguished. I left it in the summer-house.'

'This is not the result of your inconsiderateness? Eh?'

'No, Mr. Sellwood; indeed, it is not!'

'Then how came it about?'

'I do not know.'

'Is the house insured?'

'I do not know.'

'What are you going to do? Where are you going? You must not stay here.'

Then up came Mr. Cornellis in his dressing-gown.

'I say, Cornellis,' said the rector, 'this is a bad job. How did it come about?—But no; no questions now. We must put the ladies under shelter. Poor Miss Judith looks ready to die. My vicarage is at your disposal.'

'You are too kind, rector. But I cannot take the generous offer. Gotham has invited us to the Hall, and I have accepted. We are relatives.'

'O well. You would have been welcome. I fear this will be a sad loss to you.'

'When Providence——'

'Yes; exactly. Insured?'

'Fortunately I am.'

'Got your policies? Or are they burnt?'

'They are at the bank.'

'Insured well?'

'Middling.'

'And the furniture?'

'Insured also.'

'The books?'

'Also.'

'And the plate?'

'Yes.'

'And the wine?'

'Yes.'

'Then—anything not insured?'

'Not my clothes, unfortunately.'

'I'm glad you were insured; the loss won't be ruinous.'

'The loss must be heavy, very heavy, almost crushing.'

'I'm glad you were insured.—Now, get the ladies under cover. They must not be out any longer. I hope you were heavily insured?'

'Middling.'

'Insured long?'

'Only a twelvemonth for furniture and wines, and books and plate. The house was insured directly I bought it.'

'For how much?'

'About its value.'

'And your cellar of wines—all your fortunate purchases. By Jove! you may recover their value, but not the wines.'

'That is what I feel. Then there are my oriental books, my Hebrew Bible and Greek Testament, full of marginal notes. I can never replace them. But Providence——'

'Exactly,' interrupted the vicar. He had an abhorrence of cant, and whenever he suspected any one with whom he was in conversation lapsing into it, he cut him short, and in so doing sometimes acted unjustly, interrupting expressions of real feeling. But he was a blunt and downright man. 'I'm sorry for you—I am, with all my heart. How came it about? But here is Gotham, looking out for you. The ladies must be taken under shelter. I am selfish detaining you. I am glad you are insured all round.'

CHAPTER XIV.

THE TANGLE.

THE Cornellis family settled into the Hall, as if they had no intention of leaving it. At all events, neither Mr. Cornellis nor his sister bestirred themselves to find other quarters. Mr. Gotham did not care. So long as he was allowed to move about, and was flattered by Justin Cornellis, and was undisturbed in his study, he was content. Cornellis had made himself indispensable to him, and Gabriel clung to him. It was in his nature to cling, and just now his grapple of the ex-missionary was tenacious, and to another man would have been embarrassing. But Cornellis understood Gotham, or thought he did, and believed that by humouring his vanity and sloth, and by not standing in the way of his pleasures, he could twist him about to suit his own purposes. Mr. Gotham now did, what he had said he had done, execute a will in his favour, leaving him his entire estate;

making him executor and residuary legatee as well; but he gave him his private instructions, which he had made the ex-missionary solemnly promise to execute. It was in keeping with the miserable vanity of the man that he could not endure the prospect that even after death his conduct should be known; that people should be able to point to Bessie as his wife, whom he had basely deserted, after having deceived her; and to Richard, the lightship man, the vulgar sailor, as his son. He was conscious that he had behaved dishonourably, and he shrank from being found out, and having his cowardly action published, to be commented on by the world.

The destruction of Rose Cottage was complete. Nothing worth preservation remained. It had been cheaply built, the walls thin, and when the floors and roof fell in, the gray brick flanks collapsed as well. All that remained of it intact was the green boarded summer-house in the garden.

The agent of the insurance office came to Hanford and inspected the ruins. Mr. Cornellis showed him over the fallen walls, the charred beams, the trampled garden. He was frank. There had been a dinner-party that night. The servants had been hard-worked, and possibly there had been some neglect.

Servants are careless. He confessed that he ought to have gone round the house that night after all had retired, and seen that the fires were extinguished and the house locked up. He had not done so, having a sick headache. His daughter had roused him about two o'clock — he could not tell the hour exactly, he had been too bewildered to look at his watch. When he came out on the stairhead, he saw that the staircase was on fire and flames rushing from the kitchen. He had spoken several times to the cook about putting the wood for the kindling of the fires in the oven and on the hot-plate. He had forbidden it; but servants are not always obedient any more than they are prudent. As far as he was able to judge, the fire had originated in the kitchen, communicated with the pantry, where the paraffin oil was kept for the lamps, also a can of benzoline. When the oils had become ignited, such a volume of flame gushed forth that the stairs caught fire. This he suspected was the explanation of the conflagration; but he was in too great alarm and excitement when roused to take accurate observation; moreover, he had the women to look after and save. Every day he felt more keenly his loss of a wife who would have kept the maids in order. A man cannot do that

effectually, and a young girl like his daughter had not grown into the part of housekeeper. With great candour, he told the agent that it was after a disturbance with his maids relative to their reading novels in bed, and going to sleep with the benzoline light burning on the chair at the bed-head, close to the pillow, that he had doubled his insurance, and had taken the precaution to insure everything he possessed in the house.

The agent questioned the cook, who admitted having put the sticks into the oven and on the hot-plate, because they were damp and would not ignite. Anne could not remember whether she had left her cans of oil in the pantry or in the kitchen, whether they were corked or not. It was true that master had spoken to her about reading in bed a year ago, when she had set fire to and burnt a hole in the sheet by going to sleep leaving the lamp alight, and turning over in bed and upsetting the lamp.

The insurance was allowed. There was no reason why it should not be. Not the smallest suspicion was aroused that the fire was occasioned by any other cause than the carelessness of the cook, who received her dismissal and a lecture on disobedience. Mr. Cornellis refused her a month's wage on the grounds

of her having set fire to the house, and the woman was so concerned that it had been burnt down through her inadvertence that she made no demur to the loss of wage.

Josephine was not present at the visit of the agent, but she heard about it, and heard the origin of the fire discussed. It was discussed by her father at table. She was uneasy. Not a word was said about his having been up and about after midnight. Only when she found that all the blame was laid on the cook and Anne did she interfere, and then she spoke to her father when they were alone.

'Papa, why is not a word said about your cleaning up the gravy with petroleum? If Anne did leave the can in the kitchen, you must know, as you used it in the dining-room. The oil was spilled in the pantry—there was quite a pond there. I trod in it.'

'Was there a pond in the pantry? Then the can leaked.'

'But you had the can, papa.'

'I had not. I employed turpentine. I did not go near the pantry.'

Josephine was not satisfied. She could not tell her father that she disbelieved what he said; she mistrusted him. When she heard the rector and Mr. Gotham lament the loss of his wines, she opened her eyes. He

had no wines—a few dozen only in the coal-hole cupboard; he had no cellar.

The fire had this effect, that it drew her mind away from the consideration of her own trouble. She knew it might also distract the rector, and thought that he would make no further allusion to it. But in this she was mistaken. He called at the Hall a few days after the fire, and as she was in the garden, went to her, and took her hand in his, in his kindly, fatherly way. 'I have a crow to pluck with you, Josephine. I have left the crow unpicked for some while, but he has been put aside, not buried.'

She knew at once what he meant, and coloured, and sharply withdrew her hand. If she had trusted him and told him the truth, he would have been satisfied. The rector was easily satisfied, because his heart went out to meet every one who had done wrong and frankly acknowledged the fault. But she took another course, a mistaken one, a course she would not have taken had she been in a condition to judge calmly. Her father's conduct on the night of the fire had been so suspicious that she was unhappy and uncomfortable, thinking him guilty of a great act of dishonesty, and this made her peevish and jealous of interference. She dare not say what she thought;

she dreaded lest her suspicions should betray themselves, were her confidence gained by the vicar. So she armed herself with reserve, bound her heart about with pride, and met his advance without cordiality.

'My dear Josephine,' he said, 'I am not satisfied about two matters—your being on the seawall at midnight, and the fire following so soon after. I cannot shake out of my mind the thought that the two incidents are connected.'

'I told you, rector, that they were not, when you made the same remark on the morning of the fire.'

'It is strange. You were the last person up.'

'Is it necessary for me to repeat the assertion, Mr. Sellwood? I have already said that there is no connection between the two events.'

He shook his head. He disliked her tone. He looked in her face; he was displeased with the expression there. 'I see, I see; it is of no use my speaking to you. You are in an obstinate, defiant mood. I only sought your good.'

'You sought the good of the labourers when you gave them cows, and you landed them in jail.'

'Only one—only one. It is my duty to

try to do good, though, God knows, I make sad bungles in doing it. I must follow my nose, though it leads me to flounder in a bog. I can do no other.—All I wanted to say, Josephine, was, that if you had thrown down a match, or upset a lamp, or left a candle burning, so that the fire broke out, it is your duty to mention it. You were up after every one else was in bed. Have you told your father that? If the fire came from the kitchen, you would have smelt burning wood when you went into the hall. Not more than two hours after you retired the house was in a blaze. Have you told your father you were up?'

'No.' She looked down. She could not say that he knew it, lest the rector should ask further questions.

'Then tell him.—Look here, Josephine. Follow, as I do, the nose. The nose does not go far into the future; it does not turn corners; it makes no convolutions. It always points straight at what is under the eyes. Do what is a plain duty, and don't consider what is far ahead. It seems to me that this is a simple and direct obligation. Tell your father.'

She was silent, unable to answer.

'Now, Josephine,' said the vicar, 'I know what you are considering, and that is, the

question he will ask, why you were up at midnight. Tell him you had gone out into the garden, and through the gate to the seawall. Here I arrive at the chief bone I have to pick with you. If you had said to me on that night that you had come out to see the full tide flowing in the moonlight, I would have believed you. Your interview with Dick Cable would in my eyes have been accidental. But you did not say this. You told me that you came there—at midnight, remember, when every one else at Rose Cottage was in bed—to give Dick a box of gilt crackers for his children. You held out the box, to substantiate your story. Did you consider what this implied? It implied that you knew Cable was out at the gate at that time. You could only have known that by making an appointment with him to be there; and this—really, Josephine, with the respect I have always felt for you, and for Dicky Cable—this is a thought that troubles me a great deal.'

'I had made no appointment.'

'I am relieved to hear you say so. Then how did you know he was there?'

'Because I heard him whistling on the wall a tune—the mermaid's song in *Oberon*.'

'Really, Josephine!—God forgive me! I do not wish to entertain evil thoughts of any

one, least of all of you. But this is most extraordinary. I have heard of housemaids arranging with their swains to whistle for them when they are outside the back-yard—and this looks much like the housemaid practice exalted to parlour tricks.'

'I am sorry you think so,' said the girl haughtily. 'I cannot help your thoughts, rector. It was, however, no such thing.'

'I believe you. Charity hopeth all things, charity believeth all things. But I am puzzled, nevertheless.'

'I will tell you how it came about,' said Josephine after a long pause. 'Mr. Cable had learned the tune from me when we were wrecked together. After you left us, and Aunt Judith had said good-night, instead of going to bed, I sat out in the summer-house, and whilst there, I heard Mr. Cable whistle the air. Then I recollected I had put aside a box of crackers for his children, and I fetched them, and took them out to him.'

'It was most inconsiderate, Josephine.'

'No doubt it was; but I did not suppose you would have caught me.'

'Whether I caught you or not is beside the matter. You should not do such things. You should think.'

'I followed my nose,' said Josephine. 'I

did not consider consequences. I acted on the impulse of the moment—a harmless one.'

'A most improper one.'

'What! To give sugar-plums to little children!'

'To go out in the dead of night to meet a single man, to whatever class of life he may belong. My dear, what a pity you have no mother!'

'Shall I ask my father to give me another?'

'Josephine, this is no joking matter. If you are not more considerate, you will compromise yourself past recovery. You may be thankful no one knew of this escapade except myself and Algernon. Now, go and tell your father about it.'

'He knows I was up that night.'

'What! Does he know everything?'

'No—only that I was up.'

'Tell him all. Never seek to be other than open. I am glad you told him that. It will make it easier for you to tell him the whole truth—the rest that has been kept from him.'

'No, rector,' said Josephine impatiently; 'I will tell him nothing; I have told him nothing.'

'Yet you say he knows.'

'I do not say I told him. He may suspect. He may have seen me come in.'

'No, Josephine; he went to bed directly after Algy and I left, as he suffered from a bilious headache. I thought he was not himself that evening. So he was asleep long before you were on the seawall, and he did not wake till you roused him.'

'Who told you that?'

'Himself. I heard him say so several times—to the insurance agent, for one.'

'Then I will say nothing more,' exclaimed Josephine. 'Think what you will of me. I cannot clear myself.' She laughed bitterly. 'I have a maid-servant mind. I make appointments to meet my young man on the sly after midnight; I bid him whistle when he is at the trysting-place; I slink out and meet him. What a pity you came, rector, and interfered; we might have eloped together, and then been had up and charged with incendiarism, and sentenced to hard labour for seven years. What fun! I should have liked that amazingly—seven years taken care of, thought for, with no responsibilities, no enigmas to puzzle out, no society before which to wear a mask, no necessity laid on me for lies and dissimulation.'

'Josephine! Have you lost your head?'

'No, rector, except with excitement at the prospect of such blessedness as to be in for seven years. O rector! let me rob you of your watch and get convicted. I should dearly like it. To think of knowing exactly where I was, of having a perfect conviction that the ground under my feet was solid, of having all one's world in sharply defined categories; these men are warders, and not criminals; these are criminals, myself included—I burn down houses, you say—and are not warders. And this man in a black coat, with whiskers and white tie, is not a criminal nor a warder, but a chaplain. Here, without, no one knows who is who, and what is what. You, dressed as a parson, may be my warder; and Richard Cable, disguised as a sailor, may be my chaplain; and my father, who carried the gospel to the dispersed Tribes, may be a lost Israelite, wanting the gospel more than the rest. Who can tell? What am I? I do not know—a true girl, a liar, honourable, deceitful—a lady, a maid-servant? I do not know myself what I am, much less do I know others.'

'Josephine,' said the rector gravely, 'you are talking in a random manner. I sought your confidence, and you have refused it me. I cannot allow you to act as recklessly as you

talk. I shall be forced—what I wished to have avoided—to speak to Miss Judith about you.'

'As you will,' said Josephine with a sigh. 'I do not wish, dear rector, to reject your offer, but I cannot help myself. Do you understand how sometimes one may be puzzling with a tangled skein of silk or common twine, trying to undo the knots and to find the end; and how that then, if another comes up and offers to assist you, you decline the help, because you are sure the second set of fingers will complicate the tangle and unravel nothing?'

'What is the skein you are engaged in bringing to order?'

'I do not know—my life, my ideas—the whole of that vast complexity, social, moral, religious, in which I find myself. Now, rector, do you understand me?'

He shook his head. 'My dear Josephine, it seems to me that, instead of unravelling anything, you are involving yourself in a tangle. As for the moral and religious orders——'

'There is no order in them.'

'Pardon me—my office is to help——'

'Excuse me, dear Mr. Sellwood. No one, not even you, can help me. I must work out

my puzzle for myself. Say it is not a tangle, but a cat's-cradle.'

'That needs two to play at it.'

'Yes, but I must choose my own partner.'

'Let me say one word, dear Josephine, and that shall be my last, on this matter. You speak of a tangle. There always will be, there always must be, complexity in life. At the same time, there is one little gold thread which, if you will hold and follow, will help you to unlace every loop, and unweave every knot, which will help to draw out every convolved thread, and establish complexity where you have supposed was confusion. Look for the golden thread, Josephine.—Good-bye.'

The corners of his mouth were working. He had a kind heart. He had known the girl from childhood. He pitied her, and he was in serious alarm for her.

'I have muddled even this,' said Josephine to herself. 'I have been rude and offended him, and he is kind; but he also, with his kind intentions, is always doing wrong things. It seems to me as if I were set a task to write a copy of copperplate penmanship on a sheet of blotting-paper. Where I want to make hair-strokes, I make smudges; and every flourish I attempt resolves itself into a shapeless blot. Now, with every desire to do me

good, the rector will make matters worse; he will tell Aunt Judith all, and she will speak to my father. So he complicates the tangle in which—how wrong he was!—there is no golden thread, only base twine and strands of dirty silk.'

CHAPTER XV.

THE 'JOSEPHINE.'

JOSEPHINE remained brooding where the rector had left her, with knitted brows and plaited fingers and set lips. 'I wish I were out of this—living a simpler life, where I could see my way plain before me.'

Then she heard 'Hist! hist!' and looked about her, but discovered no one. Then again 'Hist! hist!' and looked up, and beheld the wan face of Mr. Gabriel Gotham, with bleached eyes, and faded hair, and weak trembling lips, looking down on her from the balustrade of the terrace above. She had been pacing a walk below the terrace—the verbena walk—with the rector.

The shaking white hand of the squire was round the base of a plaster vase; she could see only his nodding head and his hand, the fingers of which worked on the vase as if he were practising on a piano.

'Don't come up,' he said, as Josephine turned to the steps that led to the terrace; then he thrust his walking-stick between the pillars of the balustrade and indicated a spot below where she was to stand.

Josephine took up the position he required; and he spoke to her over the stone rail, with his chin resting on it and his hands hanging over it—a picture of imbecility. As his chin was on the stone, when he spoke the upper portion of his head moved, instead of the chin.

'What is it? What have you been doing? What about Richard Cable?'

Josephine's frown deepened. It was too vexatious to have had her conversation with the rector overheard. 'Cousin,' she said, 'I have had a private conversation with Mr. Sellwood. I did not solicit it. He thrust it upon me. Neither he nor I desired that it should have taken place within the hearing of an eavesdropper.'

'How rude you are to me!'

'A privilege of relations.'

'I did not intend to listen. I was here, and you were beneath. I did not hear everything. I did not suppose that you and the rector had anything to say to each other which the world might not hear.'

'What did you hear?' asked Josephine shortly.

'I—I do not rightly understand. I think something was said of your meeting Richard Cable at night, without your father's knowledge, on the seawall. But I did not catch how long these private interviews had been going on.—Oh! how improper!' then he exploded in a cackling laugh.

Josephine coloured. 'You have just heard enough to let your fancy run away with you, Mr. Gotham,' said she. 'It is true that I did go out through the gate at night to Mr. Cable, because I had some bonbons for his children. It was a brilliant moonlight night, as light as day, and I never for a moment thought there was any harm in my doing so. *Honi soit qui mal y pense.*'

'Did I hear that the hour was past midnight?' His blear eyes twinkled with cunning.

'Yes; it was past midnight. The vicar and Captain Sellwood had been dining with us. After dinner, I took the box down to Mr. Cable.'

'How did you know he was there? Had you appointed that he should be in waiting to receive the box?'

'Cousin Gotham,' exclaimed Josephine

angrily, but with tears of mortification rising into her eyes, 'why am I to be subjected to catechism by you as well as by the rector, and go over to you the same story, make to you the same self-exculpation?'

'Because, my dear, I have heard of the circumstances. You will have to explain them and exculpate yourself to everyone who hears about this midnight meeting, the sweet *tête-à-tête.*'

'No one else will hear of it. It was an accident. It was a bit of thoughtless imprudence on my part. I will not do it again.'

'A nine days' wonder to all the parish. How the old women will talk, and the sailors joke over their ale about it!'

'No one will know anything about it but yourself, who have surprised the secret—not that it is a secret. I meant nought by going out on the wall but what I have said, to carry a bonbon box to the children. I declare!' Josephine burst forth angrily, 'I will never attempt to do a kind thing again. It is not often the fancy takes me. When I do a considerate act, I have to suffer for it. You are learning that, Cousin Gotham, also. You have housed us after the fire, and cannot shake us off.'

'I do not want to be rid of you, Josephine.'

'And Aunt Judith? Is the attachment so great that you cannot part with her?'

Mr. Gotham laughed, his head waggling on the balustrade as though it were loose and rolled on it, and might at any moment roll off.

'Have you read of the Struldbrugs, Cousin Gotham?'

'What—in "Gulliver's Travels?" The old people who never die?'

'Yes. Papa says that he cannot believe in Struldbrugs, because they would have all their juices drawn out of them by their friends and acquaintances. Friends and acquaintances become to old people barnacles that adhere and perforate. They can be shaken off by those who are young, but not by the old, and they cover up and corrode the latter. I think we are barnacles stuck upon you.'

'Am I a Struldbrug? or a drift-log? Did your father say that? Or is this a piece of your pertness?'

'Oh, he was not particularly alluding to you,' answered Josephine. 'At least I do not remember that he was.'

Mr. Gotham got up, and let Josephine see that he did not consist only of head and hands.

'Shall we go a little stroll together?' he said. 'Will you take my arm?'

'I shall be delighted,' answered Josephine, and waited, and held out her arm for him to take. That was what he meant by her taking his arm: she was to support him.

He came tottering down the steps. Josephine, tall and vigorous, full of the bloom of youth, formed a striking contrast to this mean, decrepit old man.

'Am I a Struldbrug?' he asked, leering up in her face. 'What was your father talking about that he should come upon the Struldbrugs?'

'I really do not remember.'

'Or old logs washed up covered with barnacles?'

'No; he did not speak of you as a log, cousin.'

'I should not be surprised if he had been thinking of me. I suspect he speaks one thing to my face and another to my back. I may be esteemed a Struldbrug or a log; but I am not one or other. I have eyes in the lobes of my ears, and can see more than some suspect.' Then he cackled. 'The barnacles may not find so much to suck out of me as they reckon upon.'

'Where shall we go, Cousin Gotham?'

'Oh, anywhere. I want a change.—On to the seawall,' he continued, laughing, shaking his sides and the hand that rested on Josephine's arm.

'That fire has been a terrible loss to your father,' he said, still laughing. 'His books—his wine—his plate! He will save something in housekeeping by living here, barnacling on me, as you call it. The insurance was heavy. I really should not have thought your father had such valuable furniture and wines and books. But it will not be paid for six months, I suppose?'

'I know nothing about it,' said Josephine abruptly.

'Why do you not call me Cousin Gabriel?' asked Mr. Gotham. 'You know we are relations. Your father's mother was a Gotham, sister of my father, and of old Uncle Jeremy, who bought this place.'

'Which way shall we go?' asked Josephine, without answering his question.

He waved his stick in the direction he desired to walk; then he went on: 'Your father no doubt reckons on having the Hall when I am gone. Has he ever spoken of the changes he will be making in it? Trees he will cut down, rooms he will alter?' He peered up in her face craftily.

Mr. Cornellis had done this. Josephine would not say he had not, so she diverted the attention of the old man to something else, a thing easily done. 'I suppose now I can bring the Cable children here any day, as you desired, to look for sugared almonds in the wren-nests?'

'Not for the world!' exclaimed Gabriel with a start. 'I would not have it done now, whilst your father is here. It might be thought a precedent, and he would not like it; he who is to inherit the place when that old Struldbrug, Gotham, is withered and cast away, when that old log is so barnacle-bored as to be worthless.'

'He could not object, if you wished it.'

'I wish it no longer.'

'I am sorry I mentioned the Struldbrugs to you. You continue referring to them, as though my father or I had associated you with them in idea, which is not the case.'

'I do not desire that the children should be brought to the garden now. It was another matter before. Then I had nothing to amuse me, now I have you.'

'I will do what I can for you, Cousin Gotham. I shall make you skip and wince with the stings of my sharp tongue.'

'I do not mind that; but I do object to be riddled by barnacles.'

They were near the willows and the cottage inhabited by the Cables. Gabriel looked uneasily about him, as though seeking something, yet fearing to find it. He started as, turning the corner of the wall, he came upon Richard.

Richard Cable removed his cap respectfully to him and to Josephine. The latter coloured and smiled.

'How are the little white mice?' she asked. 'All seven snug and neat and happy?'

'Thank you, miss; my children are well and happy, praised be God!'

'Mr. Richard Cable,' said Gabriel Gotham with a faltering voice, 'would you do Miss Cornellis the favour of following us to Messrs. Grimes and Newbold's dock?'

Josephine hastily turned and looked at the old man. She had forgotten all about the ship in the excitement consequent on the fire. Gabriel had not again alluded to it; and she had concluded, if for a moment she had considered the proposal, that it had passed from his feeble memory. Now she was quite unable to pay for a ship, as her money was gone; and since that affair of the night of the fire, it would not be proper for her to

give the vessel to Richard. She tried to catch Mr. Gotham's eye, to show him that the suggested visit displeased her; but he studiously averted his face.

'Mr. Cable,' said Josephine, 'do not come with us. Mr. Gotham and I were engaged in conversation which we must finish. Follow us in a few minutes in the direction of the dock. First run in and kiss the little ones for me. By that time Mr. Gotham and I will have finished our business together.'

Richard obeyed. He went over the plank-bridge to his garden. Then Josephine, dropping Gabriel's arm, said hastily, eagerly: 'It won't do. It must not be. I thought you had forgotten all about the boat, or I would have spoken earlier.'

'Why not? The vessel is ready; she is painted, and named. The orders were given directly we had made the arrangement.'

'O Mr. Gotham, what is to be done?' gasped Josephine. 'I cannot pay you, neither now nor in the future.'

'Cannot pay now; but you have your money coming in shortly.'

'Not at all. Papa—that is—there has been a bad investment. I do not know exactly how it is, but—papa has been unfortunate about my money. He put it where

he thought he had the best security, and—the money is all gone.'

'Your mother's fortune gone?'

'All gone. I have nothing.'

Then he cackled. 'What an unfortunate fire that was at Rose Cottage!'

Josephine, in distress and annoyance, turned sharply away. 'You understand, Cousin Gotham, I cannot pay for the ship—now—never.'

'But it is bought and paid for in your name, and your name stands in gold letters on the bows. A pity we did not have a cast from your face for the figurehead.'

'O Mr. Gotham!'—she clasped her hands—'why did you act with such precipitation?'

'Why did you not tell me in time that you were without means? You can sue your father, and make him indemnify you out of the insurance-money.' He laughed.

'I cannot do that,' she said vehemently. 'Why do you laugh? This is no joke. You have brought me into great difficulties.'

'There; do not be so distressed. I have risked the money without taking a written authority from you. I have been incautious. I must bear the loss.'

'But I cannot take advantage of you in this way.'

'Let me take your arm again, and go on to the yard. Set your mind at rest. You and your father and aunt are my nearest kindred. If you cannot pay, it does not greatly matter. I must leave you something in my will. I will forgive you the debt in my last testament; you shall consider it as the present of Cousin Gabriel. That will set your conscience at rest. Eh?' He peered up at her.

Josephine was not satisfied. She was vexed with Mr. Gotham, who was a man to talk, but not to act; and he had sprung a surprise upon her which increased her difficulties. 'These unreliable men,' she thought, 'always do the things which had better be left alone, and neglect what they ought to execute promptly. Who would have supposed he would take me at my word without further consultation? What will my father say?'

As they reached the yard, Richard Cable caught them up, and walked respectfully behind.

'Come on, Mr. Cable; don't lag,' said Gabriel. 'Miss Cornellis has come to see this smack that Messrs. Grimes and Newbold have been building, and which she has bought—a yacht, you understand. She is so fond of the

sea, had such a taste of it when she was out in the lightship, that she wants more. She would like your opinion of the vessel, Mr. Cable. I am no judge. I have nothing to do with it except to act for her as her agent in the matter. If she had ordered me to engage for her a Newfoundland dog, I would have done so.'

Josephine's face was dark with annoyance and shame. She would have protested, but saw that it would avail her nothing. The mischief was done, the ship was ordered and paid for in her name. It was hers whether she wished it or not; and of course she could not retain it herself. The little craft was one to charm a sailor's heart, trim and fresh, beautifully proportioned from stem to stern. She had plenty of floor, while her lines aft were delicately fine, and her long hoist and light draught promised fast sailing powers. Her builders, Messrs. Grimes and Newbold, were proud of her; and the fishermen and sailors who studied her as they walked round her, like dealers about a horse, gave their opinion in her favour as a model combination of strength and speed. She was freshly painted, and her figurehead glittered with the new gilding put on it.

'Well, Mr. Cable,' said Gabriel Gotham, 'what do you say to her?'

'She's a beauty,' answered Richard—'no mistake.'

'Ought to be a beauty,' sniggered the squire; 'named after Miss Cornellis. You see—she is the "Josephine."'

'Yes,' said Richard. 'And not beautiful only. She is all spank with paint and gilding now, and that will be battered away with wind and wave, and worn with time; but she will be good and seaworthy, and obey her helm.'

'Should you like to be captain of the "Josephine"?' asked Gotham, looking slyly first at him, and then round at the builder and some of the workmen who stood by, and were listening.

'I've not the chance,' said Cable.

'If you had the chance?' asked the squire.

'I'd do my duty by her,' answered Cable.

'You would do your duty by any trust,' said Josephine, gathering up the courage to speak. She was afraid of what Mr. Gotham might say; she did not like his tone—it chafed her. If the announcement must be made, it were better that it came from her.

'Mr. Cable,' she said, and, as she spoke, she trembled with nervousness, 'you rendered me a great service when I might have been lost. I owe you my life. I have not suffi-

ciently thanked you for your great kindness to me in my peril and distress.' She spoke so far with downcast eyes; but as she remembered the lightship and what had passed on it, his pity, his gentleness towards her, she looked up into his face. Her olive skin was suffused with colour; her large beautiful eyes trembled with timidity, and she continued: 'You will not be so unkind now, Mr. Cable, as to refuse to accept from me this little acknowledgment of your goodness to a poor storm-tossed, shipwrecked girl. It would hurt me inexpressibly were you to do so. Will you—will you accept the "Josephine," and be her captain and owner?'

She put out her hand—her heart was full, partly with fear, partly with warm feeling—and laid it on Cable's arm. He caught her hand between his rough palms, and said: 'I thank you. I will not refuse. I cannot refuse. I will do my duty by her, miss.'

CHAPTER XVI.

IN DOCK, OUT NETTLE.

'HA!' said Mr. Gotham, 'there is the rector.—Excuse me, Josephine; I must leave you here. I have business with Mr. Sellwood, and shall be with him a little while. You must walk home alone, or—or get Mr. Cable to escort you.' Then he hobbled, wheezing, to the rector, holding out his hand.

'If Miss Cornellis wishes an escort,' said the captain, who was with his father, 'I offer myself.'

'Thank you, Captain Sellwood; I accept it,' answered Josephine, and turned to go back to the Hall along the shore without another look or word for Richard Cable. It would not do for her further to favour him, after the gift of the vessel, especially in the presence of so many bystanders. She walked slowly along the shore beside the captain. On the right was the seawall for a little way, with a ditch behind it full of bulrushes,

waving their red-brown heads. On the left, the flats of mud, with the tide running in the channels. Their feet were on the narrow strip of shingle, made up of flints, fragments of rolled chalk, and lumps of coral rag. A film of bleached seaweed and cast crab shells formed an almost unbroken fringe. A little further ahead was rising ground, broken banks covered with old oaks, under which, in spring, the bluebells abounded; they were now in flower, flushing with blue bloom the little slope. Here there was no seawall; there was no need for one. Beneath the bank was a long strip of coarse smooth grass, which went locally by the name of the Bowling-green. This was only covered by high spring tides. It was perfectly level, and may at one time have been used in the way its name implied. It was not suitable for cricket, because it was narrow. Moreover, a spring oozed out of the bank, and became a swamp on the land side of the bowling-green. At the extremity of the green walk this rill discharged itself into the sea; and there a few piles had been driven into the soft soil, on which the feet could rest whilst passing over to solid ground beyond. Then the sandy cliff—if cliff it can be called where no stone showed—ceased, dying away, and the seawall began again.

Captain Sellwood walked beside Josephine without saying much, and she was too much occupied with her thoughts to desire conversation. When, however, they came on the bowling-green, the only picturesque bit of the coast where utter flatness and mud did not force themselves on notice, Captain Sellwood worked himself up to converse.

'It is a fine day, to-day.'

'Yes; I perceive it is so.'

'I am sorry so many of the old oaks here have been cut down.'

'I also am sorry. We cannot afford, on this coast, to part with a single element of beauty. He who pollards a willow or destroys an oak should be stoned to death.'

'We should have to send over to Kent for the stones, as we produce none on the spot.'

They walked on a little further in silence; then the captain said: 'I may not have such another opportunity, Miss Cornellis, so I seize on this for a few private——'

'Oh, Captain Sellwood! in pity spare me. I have had two keelhauls already to-day; first by your father, and then by Mr. Gotham.'

'I am not going to keelhaul you.'

'Then let us have no private and confidential communications. Do look at the

bluebells, and admire the mixture of red-robin, also the occasional speckle of stellaria.'

'I must speak to you, Miss Cornellis. The happiness of my life depends on the answer——'

Again she interrupted him; she was nervous, annoyed. She suspected at once what he was about to say, and was unprepared for it. She had not thought of Algernon Sellwood except as a butt for her ridicule, the slow man, who had nothing to say for himself, the Morbid Fly.

'Mr. Sellwood,' she said hastily, 'we are old acquaintances, I may almost say friends. You are about to assume the privilege of a friend, and lecture me for my imprudence the other night. I have committed another imprudence to-day. I have made a present of the new boat Messrs. Grimes and Newbold are building, to Richard Cable, because he saved my worthless life; and—here is the absurdity of the situation—I have not a penny wherewith to pay for the vessel. It was ordered when I thought myself rich, and I have woke up to the fact that I am a pauper. I am going out as a governess; no—I could not endure the children—as a seamstress or milliner, or something of the sort, to earn my bread.'

'Is this possible, Miss Josephine?'

'It is certain, Captain Sellwood. My father has had terrible losses; and *my* money—I mean what my mother left—that is all lost also; so that we are left as mere barnacles, clinging to Cousin Gotham.'

'Dear Miss Josephine, as this is so, it only makes me more resolved to proceed.'

'Do you know what it is to be a barnacle, Captain Sellwood? To have all the faculties of the mind concentrated on suction?—No; you do not. I have read in some book of Natural History that the barnacle is a nautilus, provided with silver wings to sail on the surface of the summer sea; but as it gets battered by winds and upset by waves, it draws in its glittering sails and sinks and attaches itself to a stump or a keel; absorbs its wings, or converts them into a proboscis or foot, or whatever it is by which it can adhere, and is degraded at once utterly and for ever from a nautilus to a barnacle. Well—*we* have furled our wings, doffed our mother-of-pearl lustre, and have become scaly and purple, and begun to taste of copperas; we have lost all our independence, and are converted into parasites.'

'Dear Miss Josephine,' said the captain, 'you are throwing me off, trying at least to

do so; but you shall not divert me from my purpose. I must speak.'

'What about? My folly the night of the fire? Oh, Captain Sellwood, I would not have believed it, unless convinced by my eyes, that you could in an emergency be so ready. How spiritedly you went over the pales! Was your light overcoat much torn? The wood bristles with hooks like a teasel. And your sense of *les convenances* was as much lacerated as your overcoat by my preposterous behaviour.'

'I beg your pardon, Miss Cornellis; you explained how you came on the wall, and that was enough. Neither my father nor I had the slightest right to ask an explanation. When you gave us one, we accepted it as final.'

'Not your father—he refused to receive it. He has done so again to-day.'

'I received it; I have not presumed to question it.'

'You are more charitable than even your father.'

'Towards you there is no call for charity.'

'You think better of me than does either your father or my cousin Gotham.'

'I think the very best of you. I know that you are incapable of doing anything

which could make me regard you otherwise than with respect, as I do'—he paused, and then said in a low tone—'and with love.'

'With friendship,' corrected Josephine. 'I thank you for your kindly estimate; it is more generous than I deserve. Come—what do you think of my conduct of giving away a ship to Mr. Cable when I have not the money to pay for it? Is not that a swindle?'

'I think, Miss Josephine, that your generosity outruns your judgment, whether in the matter of ships or of crackers.'

'I thank you for your kind opinion,' she said, touched at his consideration. She had laughed at him as silent and dull, yet now he spoke well and easily. She might possibly have yielded to a warmer feeling, had she not recalled her father's words, and remembered that he had schemed that she should take the captain. Her rebellious temper at once rose, and she said: 'You only half know me. I am like the palings, full of hooks and spikes; those whom I catch I tear; those who rest a hand on me, I pierce with wounds.'

'Miss Josephine, when you were a child and played Blind-man's Buff, when caught, you wriggled, and wrenched, and ducked till you had corkscrewed your way out of the grasp of the Blind-man. You are trying the same

game with me now; but it will not succeed. I have come here determined to say what I have at heart and to know your answer.'

'I give you the answer at once, before you ask the question. It is conditional.—Does your father hold me in as high esteem as yourself?'

He hesitated. 'My father is the most kind of men.'

'And yet,' said Josephine, 'he thinks ill of me. He does not approve of your speaking to me to-day. I know he does not.—Say no more. Your father must think of me as you profess to think, before I listen to another word of what you have at heart.'

'You will not hear me out?'

'No; I have ducked and eluded your grasp. Yonder is the path to the rectory. I am going home, sir, and need no further escort.' Then she burst into a merry laugh.

'What is the joke?' asked the captain with a reproachful look in his great dark eyes. 'Is it a joke, Miss Cornellis, that a man should have laid his heart at your feet and you should have trodden on it?'

'How serious you are, Captain Algernon!' she said, the laugh dying on her lips. 'Excuse me, if I see droll similitudes. You are generally so silent, and have so little to say

when we talk on common matters, and now you are eloquent.'

'Because it is not a common matter on which we speak.'

'No; you are like the gannet. I had a tame one in the garden for some time. It could not fly because it was on level ground. It flapped its short wings against the grass and waddled. One day I set the bird on the top of a high wall; at once it precipitated itself into the air, and away it flew, and soared, and was speedily out of sight. The solan goose is incapable of doing more than flap and waddle when on a level; it must be on high to be able to start for a flight. Is not that like yourself, Captain Sellwood? Have I hurt you? *Gare la cheville barbelée!* I warned you against the spikes and crooked nails.—There is your path, and this way lies mine.'

He obeyed her, and went along the path through the clover field she indicated. She looked after him, and at once regretted that she had spoken about the solan goose. It was not kind, after his deference to her. They had known each other for years, and she had often challenged him with her jokes, and laughed because he was slow to respond, or, to speak more truly, incapable of responding.

She had carried her joke too far; she had indeed wounded the man when he had shown her a good and generous heart. As he opened it to her, she had struck it. Did she dislike him? No; she had a regard for him—not a keen one; he had never interested her; but as a member of a worthy and well-to-do family she respected him; as an old associate of childhood she liked him. That was all. Regard, respect, liking, went no further. Only to-day did she see that there was in him more than showed in common life. Only now did she perceive that in him was that which might convert negative regard into positive affection. She felt tempted to run after him and say: 'I am sorry, Captain Sellwood, that I spoke about the gannet and made fun of you. I was in a perverse mood.'

But her pride would not suffer her to do this. If she had done this, he would have forgiven her immediately, as she well knew, as also that he would immediately have pursued his advantage and proposed fully to her. She did not wish that. She did not know her own mind. It was true she did not love him, but she loved no one. If she must marry, Captain Sellwood was harmless; and a husband who would not be exacting and promised docility might suit her better than another.

She had made a mistake again. She had treated a serious offer with levity. She had met it in an improper spirit; and she had insulted the man who had shown her the most generous trust, in spite of appearances to her disadvantage.

It was her fate to be always saying and doing the wrong things. Why was she so wayward in heart that she revolted against those who proposed to lead her and against anything suggested to her? The reason she did not know. The reason was that from childhood she had seen only falseness, and had contracted suspicion against her father, her aunt, against everyone and everything, so that the natural truthfulness of her nature was in a chronic condition of hedgehog with bristles erect. She was perverse because she wanted to go straight where all was crooked, and when she came among those who were sincere and honourable, she was unable at once to take her direction. There are conditions of the body in which the eyesight is disturbed, and sees the air full of floating black spots. The eye may look into the purest of skies, but the vision is blurred with these sailing stains, as clouds of midges. It is so with the mental vision; when the spirit is not in good health, it also sees obscurely, and its

vision is full of deceptive black spots. It was thus with Josephine. The moment the captain was gone, she knew that she had behaved badly; she had seen only the ridiculous in him, and that she had thrown away a chance which she ought not to have cast aside unconsidered. When we are troubled with floating black specks, we know at once that we need a tonic or an alterative dose. We consult a doctor, and are uncomfortable till these irritating black spots clear from our sight, and we can look our neighbours in the face, or into the silver summer cloud, without seeing that disturbing drift. But we are not so anxious to correct the moral vision; and we are content to look at all who surround us, and see these specks, and let them thicken and become multitudinous, without an effort to dispel them, and—here is the singularity of the case—we do not seem aware that the spots are not where we look, but in ourselves. It is our own disordered mind which sends them up as a cloud of midges from a stagnant pool.

Josephine was startled out of her brown study by a hare that dashed over the seawall and ran splashing through the water athwart the mudflats towards the sea. Quite small matters sometimes divert our minds from

great considerations, and it was so now with Josephine. She looked round, and saw that the captain in crossing the clover field had disturbed the hare, and the creature raced away towards the open sea.

'You poor fool,' she said, 'flying from an imaginary danger, you are running to your death.'

The captain had no gun. A race of water, now shallow, lay between the flats and the shore. Unless the hare returned immediately, the rising tide would intercept it before the flats were flooded.

She looked after the hare till she could see it no more. Then she walked on to the willows, and, feeling tired, not so much from walking as from worry of mind, she seated herself on the little plank-bridge, with her feet hanging above the placid water of the dike. The dike was here broad and deep. Along the coast, a channel behind the seawall receives the drainage from the land, and at intervals discharges itself into the sea through sluices so contrived that the rising tide closes the doors. When, however, the sea has fallen, then the pressure of the fresh water behind opens the sluices, and the stream pours away down a channel it has cut for itself and also paved for itself with pebbles, lying between

the clay banks. One such channel extended from the dike to the open sea at the end of Cable's garden. Up channels such as this boats can approach the shore, and in such channels bathers disport themselves without fear of sinking in the mud, because of the pebbly floor. The tide was out, consequently there was movement in the moat; all the blossoming, white, yellow-centred water-plantain was drifting one way with the current. By the margin, the pink flowering rush stooped in the same direction.

Josephine's head was throbbing and hot; she removed her hat, and bending down to the water, gathered a couple of handfuls of plantain, and filled her hat with it and put it on her head. The cold wet leaves and flowers sent freshness into her heated brain; the water ran down her cheeks, her hair, and over her forehead. She sat still, enjoying the coolness, resolving, when the leaves had spent their freshness, to replace them with others. Then Richard Cable came to the plank end and said: 'You here, miss! What are you doing?' Then, seeing the moisture on her cheeks, 'Surely not crying?'

'In dock, out nettle,' answered Josephine. 'I am drawing the fire out of my brain with water-plants.'

'Still troubled with bad thoughts, Miss Cornellis?'

'Always. I cannot get rid of them—always stinging and burning; and I am angry with myself to-day; I have done so many foolish things. There; these plantains give me no more ease.' She took off her hat and threw out the crushed herbs. 'Am I in your path? Do you want to go by, Mr. Cable?'

'No,' said he. 'Do not let me disturb you. Is your head very hot?'

'Like a coal of fire.'

Then he put his rough sailor hand on her head; but though the hand was rough, the touch was gentle as if a plantain leaf had lighted on it.

'Hold your hand there,' said Josephine, 'it is better than the dripping leaves.'

'Do you remember what I said to you a little while ago?' he asked, still with his hand on her throbbing head.

'What?' she asked, without stirring.

'It was anent the ladder, miss. You will never have a cool head and walk with steady heart till you can do that.'

'Do what?' she asked again, and did not move her head.

'Please, miss,' he said, his rough voice lowered and becoming soft, 'when I was a

little chap, I was sent up the shrouds in a gale of wind. When I was aloft, I looked down, and it seemed as if I was lost—the sea was like as if it was rising to swallow me, and the ship was heeling over, and I must fall and be drowned. My head went round like a teetotum, and my heart sank into my shoes. I should have let go and gone overboard, and there'd have been no Dicky Cable alive now; but the mate—he saw what was up, and he shouted to me: "*Look aloft, lad—look aloft!*" and I did, miss. You'll excuse if I'm forward. No impertinence meant, miss.'

He withdrew his hand and the fire came back into her brain.

'I cannot,' she said; 'indeed, I cannot. I have not the power.'

CHAPTER XVII.

AS THE HARE RAN.

RICHARD CABLE entered his cottage quietly; his mother was engaged with the children, preparing them for bed. Six little white things sat side by side in their nightshirts, with their small feet hanging down, on the bedside, their yellow hair combed out, wet, and spread over their shoulders. Mrs. Cable was washing the baby, who was quite naked; and she had a thick towel, and was rubbing the little head, and working the short hair into curls by doing so. The baby did not mind the water or the towel; but the towel had a fringe, and the tiny fingers tried to catch the fringe and pull it out, with a view, doubtless, to ultimately eating it.

Over the bed was cast a blue-and-white check coverlet; and the walls were white-washed. There were white valance and curtains to the small window. Above the bed was a coloured chromo-lithograph of Christ

blessing little children; and under that, a photograph of Polly, the mother of the seven.

'There is your father,' said Bessie Cable; 'say your prayers to him.—Now—not all of you at once off the bed.—Sit still, Effie and Jane; take care of Lettice and Susie; they will tumble.—Mary first; only the twins shall say their prayers together, because they are twins.'

So Mary, as the eldest, descended from the bed and came over the floor, her little feet, still wet, printing themselves on the deal-boards. She knelt down at her father's knees as he sat on a low chair, and began her prayers. He removed his hat, and as the golden evening light poured into his face through the window, he put his hand over his eyes. Then, when Mary had done, she stood up, kissed her father, and scrambled on to the bed again; whilst Effie and Jane slid down and knelt, one at the right foot, the other at the left, of their father and closed their little hands on his knees.

When all had done but the baby, then there were six of the prettiest little heads laid on white pillows in one bed, three at head and three at foot, all with twinkling blue eyes and smiling lips and golden hair. Then Richard, with his great rough hand, smoothed

the sheet, turned down at top under all the little chins, and stood and looked at them.

'Do you know,' said he, 'that here on this flat Essex coast in spring the sea-birds come and make their nests in the marshes and on the saltings? Now, if there were to be high tides then, the poor little fledglings would be drowned, and the parent birds would fly about screaming, broken-hearted, unable to do anything for their young. But God thinks of the sea-birds, and in spring on this coast, He sends us the *bird-tides*—that is, very low tides—all the while the little ones are in the nests and unable to escape. When your father was in the storm, and his boat broke from her anchors and was swept away and wrecked, he was not drowned. God thought of the little birds in their downy nest, and spared him for their sakes. There are bird-tides to men as there are to feathered fowl.—Now, go to sleep.'

His mother said: 'Dick! do look how baby has torn out my gray hair!'

He took the child, and spread out the tiny hand in his own great palm and sat studying it. The infant was quite happy on her father's knee, feeling one strong arm about her.

'What is it, Dick?' asked Mrs. Cable.

'Nothing,' he replied; 'only, I was looking at the little mite of a hand, and thinking if there were not bird-tides to us, these tiny fingers and delicate little bones would never come to be great and strong and hard as mine.'

'I wish you'd take the bath down for me,' said Mrs Cable. 'It's heavier than I can carry.'

'I'll give the soapy water to the young lettuce and broccoli—it will keep away the slugs,' said Richard.

Then he went down the few steps into the basement, holding the wooden tub, blue-painted, half-full of soapy water, in which his seven little children had been bathed. It was not easy to carry it down without spilling the contents in splashes on the stair; but Dick Cable was steady and sure-footed, as a sailor need be, and not a drop was upset. Then he went out with the tub into the garden and set it down near the bed of young plants that were to be soused with it. He returned to the kitchen for a bowl wherewith to ladle the water out, and found a tin one with a wooden handle. He knelt down by the tub and dipped the bowl. The sun was set—set to the garden; but some of the light still caught the willow-trees, and the dancing leaves were

as of gold against the blue sky. He scattered the soapy water over the bed of seedlings; then he paused, kneeling on one knee, resting the bowl on the ground, and lapsed into thought. His face was troubled; usually open as the day, a cloud was on it now, a cloud that would not disperse. From far away, the mutter of the sea could be heard as the waves broke upon the clay banks; it formed a pleasant murmur, a low bass tune, whilst in the wind the twinkling willow leaves whispered falsetto. He dipped the bowl again and distributed some more soapy water.

The evening was very still. A dog was barking on a farm perhaps a couple of miles away. Mosquitoes began to hum about his ears. He paid them no heed; they would not molest him.

Presently his mother came out and surprised him, when he had not half emptied the tub. 'What, Dick! Not done this yet?'

'I must not pour it all at once on the bed, but let it sop in little by little.'

'Dick, what is the matter with you?'

'With me, mother?' He turned his head and looked up at her, he, still kneeling, she standing behind him.

'Yes, Dick. There is something. You've been more silent and thoughtful of late; and

when you've taken the baby of nights, when fractious, and walked up and down trying to soothe it, you've not sung "There's Grog in the Captain's Cabin—Water down below," as you always used, but another tune altogether, that has no words to it.'

'I suppose I tired of the old song,' he said, smiling.

'And—"In the Bay of Biscay, O!" you have not sung that, she said.

'I'm tired of that also, perhaps.'

'But the new song has no words to it.—What is the matter with you, Dick?'

'Mother,' he answered gravely, 'I'll tell you straight out. For the first time in my life, I don't see my way plain before me. That is it.'

'What has come to obscure it, Dick?'

'Mother, do you know that Miss Cornellis has given me a ship—that which has been building of late in Grimes's yard; and she has called it after herself, the "Josephine"!'

'Well?' Mrs. Cable asked with a catch in her breath.

'And I don't know whether I ought to have accepted her, and I don't see how I could have refused; and I'm puzzled altogether—I am.'

'Why do you think you ought not to have

accepted the boat?' asked his mother, looking intently at him.

He hastily ladled out some more soapy water. 'That's not so easy to answer,' he said, and considered again.

'Dick, you've been thinking a good deal of late of this Miss Josephine.'

'Yes, mother, I have; I could not help it.'

'You should have fought against the thought.'

'I do not know that. She seems to me to be just as I seed her that night of the storm, tossing and distracted, not knowing whither she is going, or how to row.'

'She's nothing to you. You are not her captain.'

He started; he remembered the words addressed to him when he was offered the boat. 'I'm troubled about her, mother.'

'But you can do nought for her.'

He did not answer at once; he threw out some more soapy water. 'If I could help her, and she called me to help her, I would be bound to do my best.—Mother, what would you think of the captain who, in a gale o' wind, saw another vessel in distress, signalling, and were to go on his course and give no heed? Nelson, when he was engaged in a naval battle, was told that his admiral had

signalled to retreat. Then Nelson turned his blind eye in that direction, and vowed he could not see the summons to run away. But, mother, you would have me clap a blind eye to the quarter whence a poor little drifting, helmless, water-logged craft is appealing for help. 'Taint seamanship that, mother.' Then he laid aside the bowl, but remained kneeling, looking down into the tub of soapy water, where two bubbles were floating, and he watched these bubbles curiously, as though their course concerned him. One was a large bubble, the other small; the water was in vibration, and they swung from side to side; but also, as it had a circular motion, they floated near each other, and the little one drew towards the great bubble, and the great one seemed about to take the small one in tow—no—at one moment as if they would coalesce in one. He was wonderfully taken up with these soap-bubbles. His mother stood by, looking at him, and he looked at these globes.

'My dear Dick,' said Mrs. Cable, 'you're deceiving of your own self. You think you're acting out of pure charity, and it's no such thing. There's something more than charity in your heart—there is love.'

He made no answer; he was engrossed in

the course of those bubbles; they were riding side by side, swinging round the tub.

'It is of no use, Dick. You've heard what the sailors tell of the spirit-ship; all white painted, with white sails and gilded prow, crowding by in the moonlight. When she is hailed, she makes no answer; and when you are drawn on, all at once you are on a rock or a sandbank, and the spirit-ship has disappeared. She is this ship. She is very beautiful and strange, and an altogether unknown and un-understood craft to the likes of you. She belongs to another world to yours—and woe betide you if you follow her! She will lead you to your ruin. The sailors say that there are troubled souls in the spirit-ship that will find no rest till she is brought into port and to anchor. But what are you to board her and take the helm and conduct her? That is not for you—for such as you. It won't do. The spirits must man and guide the spirit-ship, and the mortals keep their distance.'

Then Richard Cable, still following the bubbles, put his finger to them, to insist on their uniting; and instantly they burst, and no trace remained.

'Dick,' continued his mother, 'it is all folly. She is a born lady, with a fortune and education, and gentle belongings and tastes

and cultivated thoughts; and you're nought but a common sailor lad, with no money and no learning, and only a vulgar mother, and seven little children.'

He seized his mother's hand and kissed it, when she said—a vulgar mother. She took no notice, but went on: 'Seven little children, all exacting, and needing much forethought and patience to rear them aright. Now, how can you think it possible that such a one as Miss Josephine Cornellis should stoop so low as to you?'

'I do not think it,' he said hastily; 'I never have dared to think it possible. I would not ask it. But I cannot help myself. I must do what I can for her when she comes in her pleading way to me. She has no thought of me, nor I of her, other than as one vessel at sea signals to another, and that other makes towards her. Mother, when that is so, there is no thought of lashing the two together.'

'If the two vessels were so lashed what would happen?'

'If the sea were rough, they'd sink each other, of course.'

'They'd sink each other, of course,' repeated Mrs. Cable. 'Remember that, Dick, and don't go too near her, nor let her come too near you. Keep a wide berth between you.'

'Mother,' said he, with his fingers in the soapy water, 'what am I to do about the boat she's given me?' Then he wrote with his finger in the water, the name 'Josephine.'

'I do not know. I must consider. You will give up lightship work if you keep her.'

'Can I refuse her?'

'If you mind to stick to your present line of life, you can make that an excuse.'

'But I should hurt her, were I to refuse.'

'It may hurt her if you keep the boat. Folks will talk.'

'I might let the craft out and bide on in the Hanford port service myself as lightshipman.'

'It is a bad job either way. I wish you'd never come across Miss Cornellis.'

Richard shook his head. 'She was brought to me; I did not seek her. I was looking away to land over the dark frothing sea, to the belt of willows, thinking of my babes and of you, mother, when all at once I saw her, and that she needed help.'

'And she drew you away in thought from them and from me?'

Again he shook his head. 'They are never out of my heart. Mother, it's just like this house; sometimes the children are singing and laughing in it, and sometimes they're coiled

up and asleep. If I'm still at any moment, I think I can hear them all seven breathing, deep in me; and whilst I wait, I see their eyes open and smile at me. They are always there, but not always chirping.'

'And now you've let a young cuckoo in who will kick your own out.'

'That is not possible,' answered Richard Cable. 'If the Lord bade the cuckoo egg be laid, and the young cuckoo be reared in the same nest with yellowhammers, is it for the parent bird and nest-builder to kick out the egg? The one heart can warm them all.'

'I wish to heaven you'd never seen anything of her! I can't wish she were drowned, but anything short of that; and I wish you'd not been called in to save her, and contract an acquaintance which will do you mischief, and no good.'

'I did not seek it. I keep away from her now as much as ever I can; but it comes over me that she is *sent* to me, or perhaps that I'm called to pilot her. I cannot help myself. I do my duty up to my light. In past times, there was no difficulty in seeing my way, and now there is—it begins to be not so plain. There's something disturbing the compass, and what that is, I cannot tell; but I'll

get my bearings all right again shortly, never fear.'

'Dick,' said his mother, 'I've never spoken to you of your father, because it is no pleasure to either of us to think of him. He was a gentleman. I, a poor girl, an orphan. I was ignorant, and I thought, like you, that I could be a help and comfort to him. I found out my error too late. He was false and treacherous, and forsook me and you. All seemed to me right and simple before I took him: I could be of use to him in a thousand ways such as no lady could; and he was a man that needed me and all my little acquirements, homely as they were. But when we were married, then we found out that we did not agree together; he had his ways, and I mine; he was out of heart at once, and left me. You're making the same mistake that I did. Do you suppose that the ostrich and the eagle think alike and have the same tastes? Why the eagle is all for flying, and the ostrich for running; and the latter hides his head in the sand, and the other looks the sun full in the face without blinking. They see differently, think differently, have different pursuits. No, no, Richard, Miss Cornellis is a soaring, bold, and beautiful eagle; and you're nothing but an ungainly ostrich. Though I'm your mother, I say it.'

Then Richard laughed and stood up, holding the tub in both hands, and as he laughed, the soapy water danced and splashed in the tub. He took it to the head of the sloping bed, and tilted it on one side, and allowed the water to run down the furrows between the young plants, not quickly, but slowly, that it might sink in.

The evening had closed, but there was light in the sky, that beautiful pearly twilight which makes the June nights an echo of the day. As he was thus tilting the bath, he heard a cry, upset the rest of the water, sprang up the bank, and looked in the direction whence he heard it. In another moment he was over the bank. He had seen someone —a girl—Josephine in the channel, running in the shallow water, seawards with extended arms; then he saw her fall, then pick herself up and run on. He pursued her. In that pebble-floored channel, the water deepened, the cold wavelets ran in from the open sea; if any one went on far enough, that person would be soon out of depth, between the clay banks, up which there was no climbing. The water was already deep; it was above her knees; she could no longer run; she threw herself down in the waves, and was at once caught and drawn out and held up by Cable.

'Miss Cornellis—Miss Josephine! what is it?'

She uttered another cry; she could not speak; but she put her arms round his neck and clung to him; and he carried her back, wading in the water, till he came to the sea-wall, then he crossed his plank bridge, and bore her into the cottage. As the hare had run a few hours before—poor fool!—so had she.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE YOUNG CUCKOO.

JOSEPHINE was wet, shivering, not unconscious, but as one distracted, unable to answer questions. A second time Richard Cable bore her in his arms; but before she had been hot, with throbbing heart and heaving bosom; now she was cold, trembling, and her breath coming in sobs. How she clung—with every finger as though it were a claw. Richard could feel each several finger through his jersey. Her gasping breath was on his cheek. She made no attempt to speak, to explain her conduct, to account for what she had been doing.

He did not ask anything after the first hasty query, but carried her in his strong arms as firmly, as evenly as he had carried the bath of soapy water previously. He took her upstairs, and placed her in his mother's chair in the same room with the seven little children. There were only two bedrooms in

the cottage—that occupied by the babes and their grandmother, and his own; the latter a lean-to room, into which the stair opened, and where only on one side was it possible to stand upright. Mrs. Cable followed him silently. The first thing to be done was to change the girl's clothes.

'I will run to the Hall for a dry suit,' said Richard.

Then Josephine started up and held out her hands with palms extended, quivering in remonstrance.

'Do you not wish it?' he asked gently. She shook her head. He saw that she tried to speak, opening her mouth; the lips were white, but she could not utter anything. 'Sit down again in the chair,' he said persuasively; 'my mother will lend you dry things.'

Then he went downstairs and made up the fire. A second time Josephine had been in his arms, a second time he had saved her from a watery death, and this time she was seeking her death. What had happened at the Hall?

Richard Cable left the room below; he could not be quiet; a restless fit came on him, and he went into the garden. He walked about there, found the blue tub empty, and brought it indoors. He listened, but could

not hear that Josephine was speaking. His mother was silently attending on her. He heard the heavy tread of the old woman on the boards.

Ought he to go at once to the Hall and communicate with Mr. Cornellis? He did not know. Josephine evidently disliked the idea of his going there; but was it not his duty to go? He must wait a while till Josephine could explain what had occurred, and then he would know what course to adopt. He could not see the window of the bedroom from the garden; it looked out on the road; on the garden side was only roof. He went round into the highway and walked in the road, and looked up at the window. There was no light in it. No candle was needed; it looked north-west, and the northern sky was full of silvery light. Were all the children asleep? There was no little voice heard, not even that of the baby, who, as a privilege, was laid to sleep in its father's bed, and only taken into its grandmother's when she retired for the night. How shrewd little Bessie was! She would go to sleep in no other bed. In vain did her grandmother try to lull her to roost in her own room; the blue peepers would not shut. They looked dazed; and the heavy eyelids fell over them, then drew up again, and intelligence

came into the eyes, and, alas, at the same time a peevish look, and whining began. Nothing would satisfy the tiny creature but to be put to sleep in the mean little lean-to room, on the small hard bed of the father, a bed he only occupied when off duty from the lightship. Of lightships, of duty, nine-month-old Bessie knew nothing; but she knew the lean-to roof and the little bed; and, by some mysterious instinct, was aware that it was her father's, and that she could sleep better in it than elsewhere.

When Richard Cable came upstairs for the night, the baby was gone, but in the pillow was a dint such as his fist might have made, and he knew it was the impress of Bessie's head.

He had spent thirteen contented years with his Polly: he had been much attached to Polly, whom he respected; but there had been no close union of souls in their marriage. Polly was a lusty lass when he married her, a hard-working girl, much engrossed in her daily tasks, and able to think and talk of nothing else. Richard was a meditative man; his mind was always engaged, though his hands were sometimes idle. His occupation on the lightship had fostered this habit. He did not open to many; he had few friends,

but every one respected him. He had inherited from his mother the tendency to feel most interest in those who needed help, to love those who clung to him. His wife had been an independent woman, going her own eminently practical way, asking for no guidance and support, because she needed neither; but it was different, of course, with the babes; they all were helpless; they all depended on their father, and therefore they filled a greater part of his heart than Polly had done. It is the place of the elm to sustain the vine; it is the privilege of the vine to cling to and ramble over the elm:

Ulmisque adjungere vites,
Conveniat—

as every schoolboy reading the 'Georgics' knows.

Nature has made some plants creepers and others sustainers. The creepers sometimes strangle their supports, if too embracing, contracting, exacting. A sustainer can hold up without hurt a vast amount of parasitic growth —honeysuckle wreaths, exhaling sweetness; evergreen, glistening ivy; crimson and gold clothed Virginian creeper. It is only when the clambering plant has thrown its tendrils over the head of the supporting tree that the tree breaks down under its burden. It is

wonderful, sometimes, what a glory a commonplace tree will acquire from the parasite that clings to it: in itself it is nothing; as a means of displaying its mate, it is beautiful. I have seen an old dead trunk wreathed about with wisteria, beautiful with the lilac chains that hung about it; surrounding it with an atmosphere of honeyed sweetness; and I have seen human wisterias clinging, trailing, embalming, adorning dead memories. Though what they envelop and beautify is dead, it matters not; it is something about which they can cast their arms and hang their chains of flowers, and breathe forth the incense of their innocent souls.

These same climbers deserve a chapter in the great gardening manual of human souls. How indifferent they are to what they lay hold of, if only they may have a support. How the delicate little pink hands of the *Ampelopsis* grapple a piece of granite, and hold it that you cannot tear them away, and riot over it, and wave triumphant wreaths of victory and rejoicing! How the jessamine laces with ribbons of green round the rugged-barked pine, in preference to the smooth-skinned beech; and the pure *Devoniensis* holds to the common clay garden wall and laughs, leaning against it, with thousands of delicately blush-

ing blooms, flowery whispers of happiness and love and pride; whereas it scarce shows a few blossoms, and the buds decay unburst against the stately hewn-stone mansion wall. Why does the Bankshire prefer a cold and cheerless aspect to that which is hot with sun? Verily, the creepers deserve attention in the world-garden of humanity.

But, what are we about, rambling concerning ramblers? when our subject is the prop up which seven little climbers are throwing their tendrils, and, at this moment, an eighth, no seedling, has cast her arms and asked to be sustained, and lifted high out of the sordid soil?

Richard Cable saw the blind drawn in the lower cottage window, and then a flush of light over it; so he knew that his mother was below, and had kindled the lamp. Thereupon he went indoors, and found Josephine in his mother's Sunday dress, seated by the fire, in his mother's high-backed leather chair, a chair that had belonged to her father, who was drowned. Josephine was very pale and sallow; her hands rested on her lap; she was looking into the fire, and the flames reflected themselves in the large dark irises. She did not seem to observe Richard's entrance; she did not turn her head or raise her eyes.

Mrs. Cable was engaged between the back and front kitchen, getting some of Josephine's wet clothes cleaned of the mud that adhered, wringing them out, and putting them on lines where they might drip and dry.

Richard Cable went to the fireplace, and leaned against the brick jamb, looking at the girl. In the wooden houses of the coast, the chimneys are built of brick, and there is a brick basement on which the wooden walls rest.

'Please, Miss Cornellis, I'm sorry to interfere; but I'm bound to ask—what is to be done?'

She folded her hands, slightly raised her chin, and then her head sank again, and the eyes remained staring at the fire.

He waited a minute, still observing her, and then he said again, in a low, gentle voice: 'I'm sorry to be disturbing you wi' axing of questions as may seem impertinent, miss; but I'm bound to repeat the same thing—what is to be done?'

Again she made a slight movement with her chin, and unclosed, then reclenched her hands; but she said nothing.

Presently little Bessie began to cry upstairs, and Mrs. Cable ran up. It was the child's hour for supper, and she was exact to her time in demanding her bread and milk.

A third time Cable asked the question, and then Josephine slightly shook her head.

He must extract an answer from her; he must do something. She could not remain in his house without his letting her father know. He took a step towards her, and laid his hand upon her head, as he had laid it that same afternoon, and now, as then, the dark hair was wet. 'Is the head burning?' he asked.

Then she looked up at him without moving her head; her eyes were large, and had a strange far-away look in them.

'Now, Miss Cornellis, answer me—what is to be done?'

'I do not know,' she replied.

'But,' he said, 'I must be told. I must do something about this matter.'

'I leave it all to you.'

'May I take you back to the Hall? If you cannot walk, I will carry you.'

She held her head steady under his hand; she did not shake it, but said: 'No; I will not go back there. I will stay here; if you will take me in. If not, I will go back into the sea.'

'Miss Cornellis,' he said after a long silence, 'I do not understand what has happened.' Then he took away his hand from her head, which was not hot, but cold, and knelt down

by the fire on one knee, and stirred up the logs, and threw on a few small sticks that crackled and blazed.

'I will not go home any more.'

'But the Hall is not your home; it belongs to Mr. Gotham.'

'I will not go home to my father again.'

'Has there been a quarrel?'

'He has been angry. I will not go near him again.'

'Did he—did he strike you?'

'Strike me?—Oh, not with his hands. I should not mind that.'

'What did he do? I must ask. You leave me to decide what is to be settled about you; and I cannot decide without knowing the circumstances.'

'I am not going back to him.'

'Did he—excuse me—drive you out of the house?'

'I left, because I could not stay.'

'Why could you not stay?'

Her fingers in her lap worked nervously; she platted and unplatted them; she twisted them on one hand, and then smoothed them with the other.

'I cannot tell you all. Would you take the lamp away? The light hurts my eyes.'

He complied with her wish, and placed

the lamp in the back kitchen. Upstairs was Mrs. Cable getting the baby to sleep. Richard heard her singing:

> There's grog in the captain's cabin,
> Water down below.

He returned to the fireplace and stood against the jamb, opposite her, and said: 'Tell me everything, Miss Josephine. I am your friend. I will advise.'

'I know you are my friend,' she answered. 'I will tell you what I can; but my head spins, and I cannot think; I cannot recollect everything.' She was in no hurry; she knitted her brows, trying to recollect the chain of circumstances. Presently she said: 'It was the rector's fault; he told Aunt Judith, and she, of course, went at once to papa and told him.'

'Told what?'

'I had seen the rector this morning, and he took me to task about going on the wall to you the night of the fire.'

'It was an unwise thing.'

'You also are against me. I will say no more. Every one is turned against me. Everything I say works people up into hatred of me. I am a miserable, unhappy girl.'

'Miss Cornellis, I am not turned against

you. I say what your own common sense has told you, that you acted imprudently that night.—The rector spoke about it to Miss Judith?'

'And she, blundering, stupid old creature, went with it at once to papa. I was not in then. When he did speak to me, I saw he was angry. He does not turn red, but a greenish white, and he speaks slowly, but every word cuts like a razor; and not only so, but every word is dipped in venom, so that when it has cut you, the wound goes on festering for months, and perhaps never heals at all.'

'Your father!'—Richard spoke in slow wonder—'a father hurt, poison the blood of his child!' It was to him inconceivable. He would have allowed his flesh to be torn off his bones with red-hot hooks and pincers, rather than wound or bruise one of these tender, fragile little innocents that looked up to him in love and trust.

'My father as he speaks, when he is very angry, has a face like a dead man; but his eyes blink, and now and then he quivers, just as though he felt an electric shock; and then he is as if he would hurt with his hands; but he controls himself again, and stabs instead with his tongue.'

Richard Cable drew a long breath, and put his hand across his chest to the mantel-shelf.

'When my papa spoke to me, I knew at once he was in one of his worst moods. And I—as I always do—was ready to fire up. I am not afraid of him; he does not cow me. He makes my heart boil and foam over.'

'Does he not take you to him, and put his arm round you, and speak low, and tell you that you have pained him, and that he loves you very, very dearly?'

'Never!' said Josephine decisively. She was recovering herself. As she thought over the scene she was describing, the heat returned to her heart and fired her veins.

'Then I acknowledged it all when he charged me; and when he sneered, I said that was not all. I told him that I had bought you the ship, given it my name, and that I should pay for it out of the insurance-money for Rose Cottage.'

'What is that?' asked Cable.

She was excited now, and went on, disregarding his interruption. 'He was trustee for my little fortune left me by my mother, and he has made away with that—how, I do not know. I did not know it was gone when I ordered the vessel. Now that it is bought,

I thought I should like to pay for it, though it does not really matter, as my cousin Gotham will advance—will give me the money. Yet when my father took this line with me, I was angry and said I would claim from him some of my money out of what he would get from the insurance company. Then he stung me worse and worse; and just as a hornet will drive a horse mad, so did he make me forget everything but my pain and wrath—and I said something about the fire——' She paused, hesitated. 'Even to you, I cannot repeat it.' She halted again. 'But I believe that what I said was true.' She stammered. 'Yet, I ought not to have said it. He is my father.' Then she drew her feet together, and put her hands on the elbows of the chair, and raised herself, and her face flamed crimson, and the very hair on her brow seemed to bristle with electric excitation, and sparks to shoot out of her eyes. 'It was then he used words to me that I shall never forget—never forgive!' She stood shivering with wrath, looking very tall in the long black dress of Mrs. Cable, and in the dark room, with the firelight alone illuming her. 'After that, I would not stay.' She spoke slowly, and with intervals between her sentences, which came forth as the discharge of minute guns at sea from a foundering vessel.

'I could not stay.' She shook so that she rattled the armchair, which she touched with one hand. 'I had no home more.'

'But,' said Richard, 'though he angered you, he was your father, and a father——'

She did not allow him to conclude; she said harshly: 'Do you not understand? There are things which even a father may not say. As there is a blasphemy which has no forgiveness, neither in this world nor in the world to come, so is there an insult which cannot be endured nor be forgotten.' Her face was dark, and startled Cable with the rage and bitterness that was in it, lit with the glare from the fire.

'Why did you not go to the rector?' asked Richard.

'The rector!—after I had refused his son, and laughed at him?' She shook her head. There was no place to which I could go. Rose Cottage is burnt down. The Hall is no more a home. The rectory doors I have closed against myself. To this house I could not come.'

'Why not?'

She looked at him, then her eyes fell, and she looked into the fire. 'Because of what my father had said. There was no place for me—but the sea.' Then, unable to sustain

herself longer on her feet, she sank back into the chair.

After considering a while, Richard Cable said: 'Miss Cornellis, it was God's doing that I was the means of saving you before in the lightship. It is God's doing that I have been the means of saving you this night. Therefore, what am I, to oppose His will? I will go at once to the Hall and tell Mr. Cornellis that you are here and will remain here.'

'He will insult you.'

'I am not afraid of him or of his words. And when I've told him, miss, that you are here, then I'll get out my boat and row away to the new lightship, and stay there for ten days or a fortnight.'

Then, as he moved to go, she started to her feet again, and caught his arm with both her hands, and quivering with excitement, said: 'Do not go—do not leave me helpless, friendless. I cannot bear it. There, there—I will kneel to you, if need be, and entreat you. Be Master, Captain, Pilot—everything to the "Josephine."'

He took her hand between his own, and said very gravely: 'As I said before, I say again—I'll do my duty by her, so help me God!'

Then Bessie Cable came in, and a brilliant

light from the lamp she carried fell over them, hand in hand.

'And now,' said he earnestly, 'I go with a firm confidence to your father, for I have a right to speak in your defence and for you.'

But Mrs. Cable looking on, put her hand to her brow and said: 'The young cuckoo is in the nest!'

CHAPTER XIX.

THE 'WINDSTREW.'

GABRIEL GOTHAM returned somewhat late to the Hall; he was exhausted; it was not often that he took so much exercise, and was away from his house so long; but he was pleased with himself; he chuckled and rubbed his left hand over the back of the right, which held the walking-stick. As he came in at his gates, he met Mr. Cornellis, hardly recovered from his agitation caused by the interview with his daughter.

'Where is Josephine? I want her,' said Gabriel.

'I do not know where she is. I have had a talk with her. I am incensed. I have had to reprimand her pretty sharply. She is inconsiderate, aggravating.'

'Come with me to the Platt. I must have some curaçoa or Chartreuse, or cherry brandy. I am fagged. You look pale as well.'

The Platt was a square platform about seven feet high, built of brick, with a concreted top, to which a flight of steps led from the garden. It was said to have been originally a winnowing-floor, when wheat was grown where now lay the Hall gardens. Here, advantage was taken of the breeze from off the water to clear the corn of the husk. Such platforms still exist in different parts of England, and in the west are called 'windstrews.' They occupy a high situation, exposed to every breeze. Here, it was near the sea, because the air always stirred there, even when, at a rifle-shot inland, it was calm. This windstrew would probably have been broken down, and the bricks used for other purposes, had not the proprietors of the Hall considered it a pleasant spot on which to sit when the weather was hot, and enjoy the cool air off the water, and see the boats coming in or going out with the tide. It went now by the name of the Platt, whatever its former designation had been, Platt being perhaps a contraction for platform. It adjoined the garden wall, and occupied an angle in it, the wall rising just high enough above the platform to serve as a back to benches. On the garden side it was unrailed. The steps ran up the side of the wall to it. At the bottom of the

steps was the garden wicket-gate, almost invariably fastened.

'Where is Josephine? I want to speak to Josephine,' said Gotham again.

'I do not know where she is. She has left me in one of her tantrums. I had to speak decidedly; and she dislikes dictation: she is wayward as an unbroken filly.'

'Go into the house, Justin,' said the squire; 'tell one of the servants to bring us glasses and the liqueurs to the Platt. I cannot bear up much longer. I am too hot to go indoors. If you see Josephine, send her to me.'

Mr. Cornellis bit his lip and obeyed. He did not like being ordered about by Mr. Gotham; but he dared not show that he was annoyed. At this time he was much ruffled. His interview with his daughter had disturbed him more than he showed. He was a man who hated opposition, and above opposition, a will as strong as his own, and a mind above being humbugged. He knew that he could not delude his daughter into submission, and now he was discovering that he could not browbeat her. Accustomed to the easy natures of his sister Judith and his cousin Gotham, he was provoked at encountering opposition in his own child. He had

made his plans, and these plans were disturbed by the rebelliousness of Josephine. He wanted her to marry Captain Sellwood, partly because he desired to be free from the encumbrance of his child, and partly because he could rely on Captain Sellwood not troubling him about Josephine's fortune, which he had spent. An energetic and greedy son-in-law might make matters unpleasant for him. The Sellwoods were too comfortably off to care for a small jointure, and too gentlemanly and well connected to have recourse to law, and so expose his conduct to public notice. If they found he had behaved badly, they would hush up the matter in the family interest. His plan was, as soon as Josephine was settled, to saddle her with Judith, and himself depart, and do the best he could for himself with what money he got out of the insurance company, till Gabriel Gotham's death put him in possession of the Hanford estate. This event could not be far distant; the wretched squire was failing rapidly, and as he failed, drank more, and dosed himself with larger portions of narcotics. He was now half imbecile, and his brain would certainly soften, and paralysis ensue very speedily. For a while, Mr. Cornellis had been uneasy because Gabriel would

speak of the past, and revert, especially in his maudlin moods, to the wrong he had done to Bessie and her son.

'Pshaw!' said Cornellis. 'If every one of us took to heart the faults of his youth, as you do, none of us would come to grey hairs. Your father and uncle made the woman a good offer; she refused it, and with that the matter came to an end. You are quit.'

But this did not wholly satisfy Gabriel. The recollection of his treachery haunted him, and he took to liqueur-drinking and opiates, as much to still the voice of self-reproach as to lull the nervous pains he felt.

If Bessie Cable had not lived in the same place, it would have been better for him. The occasional sight of her and of her son renewed in him the stings of conscience. But though he felt these stings, he was too cowardly and weak to redress the old wrong.

Bessie had stood in the way of his marrying. At one time, he had visited a neighbouring squire and paid attention to his daughter —one of his daughters; and because the squire had five sons and six daughters, and his estate was heavily burdened, he would have been glad to dispose of one of the girls to the owner of Hanford. Miss Wakeham

also, knowing herself to be slenderly provided for, would have accepted him. Gabriel rode over twice a week to Woodley Park, and walked and flirted with Miss Wakeham; but just as everyone supposed he was about to declare himself, Bessie Cable reappeared in Hanford, and Gotham became frightened. He expected that she would repeat the story of his conduct to her, if he proceeded: and he hung back, ceased to visit Woodley, and remained an old bachelor.

Would Bessie have interfered? He never knew. She, perhaps, herself was undecided how to act. But he resolved not to risk the unpleasantness such a disclosure would cause. He was certain that the Wakehams would refuse the connection, if it came to their ears; they were a somewhat pinched but a proud family.

The conduct of Gabriel to Miss Fanny Wakeham was commented on, and was the occasion of some coldness between the Wakehams and him; but when she, after a twelvemonth, married a Baronet, and became Lady Brentwood, this coldness disappeared; the Wakehams were even grateful to Mr. Gotham that he had withdrawn his pretensions. The vanity of the man was enhanced by the marriage of Miss Fanny, and he liked to boast

to Cornellis and other intimates, of his old flame, Lady Brentwood, by whom, by George! he was nearly caught; but hearing that she had a deuce of a temper, he had been wise enough to cry 'Hands off.'

Justin Cornellis had gained his power over Gabriel Gotham at first by his knowledge of the secret which embittered the life of the latter. He knew it, because it was a family secret; consequently, Judith also knew about it. But Cornellis did not know that there was a son, and that mother and son lived in Hanford, till he came there and took and inhabited Rose Cottage. When the Cornellis family came to Hanford, Gotham was disturbed in mind lest the story should get out by their indiscretion. He was just then desirous of being made a Deputy Lieutenant for the county, and a Justice of Peace; and he knew that it would be fatal to his chance, were the scandal to get wind; so he cringed to Cornellis, and offered him a loan of money, were he in want of temporary accommodation, as many a man is when buying a house and fitting it up. Cornellis soon got the upper hand of the squire, and maintained such a hold on him, that, as Justin supposed, Gotham was unable to act in any way without him. He did not refrain from

jesting about the boatman's lass Bessie, the very old girl who had taken advantage of the inexperience of the young squire; and to sneer at the lout of a son, and his marriage with the servant from the rectory. Cornellis did not see that he was overshooting his mark. His contemptuous jests about the Cables recoiled on and hurt Gotham. If Bessie was such a despicable creature, what a fool Gabriel himself must have been to take up with her; if the son were such a booby, the father must have been a poor creature. Gotham did not like the jokes of Cornellis; they galled him, and wrought in him great bitterness against his cousin; and sometimes, when he was alone, it boiled up, and he clenched his fists and gnashed his teeth at the thought of the man who had become indispensable to him, but whom he hated. Cornellis did not consider that a weak man is a man on whom you can never lean; he is always devising some meanness whereby he can deceive those upon whom he fawns and to whom he clings. In playing a game with a stupid man, the faculties become lulled; we think we know exactly what moves he will make, and we are beforehand ready to countermove. But it sometimes happens that stupidity simulates genius, because it sinks

to depths beyond calculation, and surprises us by a step for which we were quite unprepared. Mr. Cornellis overestimated his own power, and undervalued the parts of the squire. He had no suspicion that Gabriel regarded him with mistrust.

Mr. Gotham seated himself on the seat, with his back to the wall, on the raised windstrew, took off his hat, and removing slowly his handkerchief from his pocket, wiped his head with a shaking hand. His weak eyes were watering, his narrow forehead was covered with moisture. The evening was warm, and he was tired. He looked about him, at his pretty garden and groves and terraces. What a pretty place it was! Yet he hardly enjoyed it. He had a conservatory, and bought for it rare plants, not that he cared for them, but that he might boast of the sum he had paid for this new orchid or that rare lily. He had a good stable, two hunters; but he rarely rode them, never hunted with them; all the pleasure he had from them was to talk about them and what they cost him. Some of his neighbours humoured him, but laughed at him in their sleeves. They humoured him for the sake of his subscriptions to the hunt and the balls, and because he gave good dinners. He was

mean in some things, extravagant in others, as oftens happens with weak men.

Now, as he looked about him, he felt uncomfortable. The idea glimmered in his cloudy mind that he must before very long leave this pretty place, his greenhouses, his pines, his hunters, his cellars, his china. All would pass from him to another. He could see the church tower behind the trees. His walled garden adjoined the graveyard, and was believed to have been taken out of it; certainly, bones were dug up on the north side of it; but the strawberries along that bed were splendid. 'I wish the Chartreuse would come,' he grumbled. 'What is that fellow Justin about?—So; he has been talking of the changes he will make when I am dead, calculating on the improvements he will effect. My grapes—my muscatel house; I have been particular to have the muscat vines all together; you can't have the proper flavour where they are mixed. He'll be eating my pines when the worms are eating me! Shall he—shall he!' He uttered these last words aloud.

'Shall he!—shall who?' asked Cornellis, ascending the steps, and taking his place on the other seat, at right angles to that occupied by Gotham. He had his back to the sea.

He asked the question with indifference; he had no idea that it concerned himself.

'I—I have been unwell to-day; I have been thinking that my health is breaking up.'

'Pshaw! You are in low spirits. Breaking up! when you have been trotting about all the afternoon like a boy of sixteen. It is I, not you, who have cause to be in the dumps. I have been irritated past endurance by that daughter of mine.—Thank you, I will have green Chartreuse.'

'What has she been doing?'

'Doing! Will you believe it? She has refused Captain Sellwood!'

Mr. Gotham's mouth opened, and he stared at Cornellis with feeble astonishment, mixed with amusement.

Cornellis remarked the latter, and said somewhat testily: 'There is nothing so funny about this. To me it is indescribably mortifying. He will have eventually fifteen thousand.'

'And she has, from her mother, about five hundred pounds in all,' said Gotham with a chuckle.

'Not so much; no—hardly four.'

'You have been very careful of it,' said Gabriel, crouching with his hands on his

stick. His glass of Chartreuse was so full, and his hands so shaking, that he did not venture to raise the glass to his lips; he stooped to the table and put his mouth to the glass and sucked the brimming contents. He looked so mean and wretched as thus bent, with his blear eyes on Cornellis, that the latter had difficulty in checking the expression of contempt that began to curl his lips.

'Yes,' he answered; 'I have been a careful trustee.'

'So Josephine told me,' said Gabriel.

Mr. Cornellis started, and the colour went out of his brow, which turned deadly white. The movement was so sudden that Gabriel was frightened, and upset the glass with his nose or chin.

'There!' said he; 'I have spilt my glass before I have half drunk it. It cost me twelve shillings a bottle, and a bottle don't hold much; it is soon gone.'

Mr. Cornellis considered whether he should ask what Josephine had said. He thought it best not to pursue the subject.

'Pour me out a little more,' said Gotham; 'my hand is unsteady.'

Whilst Mr. Cornellis complied, Gabriel said to him: 'So, Josephine has refused Captain Sellwood.'

'She told me so herself. It is monstrous!'

'There must be a prior attachment.'

Now the hand of Justin Cornellis shook, and he spilled some drops on the little table. 'Prior attachment! Of course not. To whom could she be attached? Pooh! It is absurd.'

'What was that I heard about a meeting on the night of the fire?'

'Meeting! I know nothing about one.'

'Do you know what I have been doing to-day, Justin?'

'No, squire.'

'I have been to Grimes and Newbold's dock, to see the vessel Josephine has bought, called after her name, and given to Richard.'

'Josephine cannot buy a boat. She has not the money; and I will see her at Jericho before I advance the requisite sum.'

'I have advanced it, Justin. You—you can repay me at your leisure out of Josephine's money.'

'You!' Mr. Cornellis looked at him with astonishment. This mean little man had meddled to make mischief. 'Do you know what you have done?'

'I think I do know,' chuckled Gotham.

'I think you do not,' said Cornellis angrily.

His face was becoming pale, and the lines in it hard, as if cut with a gouge in stone. 'I do not think you are aware that you have compromised my daughter's character. It was bad enough that she was on the lightship alone with that fellow; but this is worse. She gives him a vessel which she calls after her own name, and you help her, you encourage her to do so.'

'Why should she not?'

'I say, because she makes the tongues wag about her. Ever since that confounded affair of the lightship, she has been running in and out of the man's cottage.'

'And,' said Gabriel, 'she has met him at night on the seawall.'

'People will talk. There will be plenty of scandal floating. And do you expect me to put up with it?'

'Let them talk. Something may come of it that would please me well.'

'What is that, Gabriel?' Mr. Cornellis's cheeks blanched, and his hands closed. He was very angry.

'Why should she not take him?' said Gabriel. 'She likes him well; of that I am sure, and that would satisfy me.'

'It would not suit me,' said Cornellis in a husky voice.

'It would suit me excellently, Justin, as you may see, for then I could leave what little I have to Josephine, and so Richard would get it. That would be a great satisfaction to my conscience, and—do not look at me in that strange way; I do not like it, Justin—I say it would just fit in with my wishes; no one would know who he was, and my conscience would be clear.'

'Is that what you intend!' exclaimed Cornellis, starting up, and leaning forward, his face livid, his lips drawn back, showing his white teeth. 'Is that it?—That you shall never do!'

Gotham staggered to his feet also, and shrank back; he was frightened at the ghastly face and malignant expression of Justin Cornellis.

'You dare to utter this to me!' said the ex-missionary, and with his elbows drawn back. He took a step towards Gotham. 'I'll throttle you first.'

Gotham, trembling, let fall his glass of Chartreuse, and backed before the angry father, who suddenly thrust forth both his hands to grip him.

At that moment, up the steps of the windstrew came Richard Cable.

Gabriel Gotham uttered a feeble cry,

whether of terror at the approach of Cornellis, or of surprise at the apparition of Cable, neither knew, and in a moment he fell headlong from the Platt upon the garden walk below.

CHAPTER XX.

THE FLOWERING OF FORGIVENESS.

JOSEPHINE was still before the fire in the cottage when Richard Cable returned. He came in quietly. Though a solidly built man, he walked lightly, and his step as he entered the kitchen was so little audible that Josephine did not hear it. She was busied in her own thoughts.

But Mrs. Cable saw and heard her son, and at once perceived that something had happened. 'What is it?' she asked; but Richard, instead of answering her, went to the fireplace, took Josephine by the hand, and raised her.

'Look at me, miss,' he said. 'You have given me a right to exercise some sort of authority over you, for you have thrown yourself on my protection and chosen me as your adviser. I give you my opinion now, and tell you what I wish you to do, what I am sure you ought to do.'

She looked steadily into his face. He was very grave, even pale. She also saw that something had happened.

'There has been an accident at the Hall. You must return to it at once.'

Her lips began to move in protest, and a flicker came into her eyes of reviving opposition.

'Listen to me, Miss Josephine. I would not advise this unless I were sure it was right. It is right all round—right for yourself, right for your father, right for your poor cousin, right for me.'

'My cousin?'

'There has been an accident. When I came to the garden gate, I found it unhasped, and——'

'Yes; I came out that way, and may not have fastened it behind me.'

'And as I heard your father's voice close by I opened the gate and went in. I did not wish to see him in the house; I preferred meeting him in the garden.'

'I can understand that,' said Josephine. 'Was he alone?'

'No; he was on that raised place at the bottom of the garden, once used, they say, for winnowing corn.'

'Yes, the Platt.'

'He was there with Mr. Gotham.'

Mrs. Cable drew near, a great fear rising in her heart.

'I came up the steps. I do not quite know what happened. It seemed to me that there was an altercation going on; but I cannot say. I came in quickly through the gate and up the steps, and did not listen to what they were saying, nor see them till I was right on them. Mr. Cornellis was leaning forward with his hand towards Mr. Gotham, who stood inwards, so to speak, with his back to the garden, where there is no wall; and I cannot say how it came about, whether he was surprised at my sudden appearance, or whether he lost his balance stepping back from Mr. Cornellis. I say, I cannot tell how it came about, but he fell backwards off the Platt, headlong into the garden.'

Bessie Cable uttered a cry, and stood with her eyes distended with terror, looking at her son, her hands clenched, her arms stiff, stretched out at her sides.

'Mr. Cornellis and I ran down to his aid at once. I raised him in my arms. He was not conscious. I sent your father to the house, and when help came he was removed to his bedroom, and the doctor sent for.'

'Cousin Gabriel!' exclaimed Josephine, the

tears rising in her eyes. 'O poor Cousin Gabriel! What did the doctor say?'

'I did not wait to hear.'

'Is he—very seriously hurt?'

'I fear so. He did not speak. The gardener has pots and other things in the corner where he fell, and I am afraid he struck his head on some hard substance. He was not conscious. He did not know that he was being moved, and I suspect his spine is also injured.'

'You think he will die!' cried Josephine in terror. She had not realised at first the seriousness of the accident.

'I do not doubt it.'

Josephine stood in hesitation. She put her knuckles to her lips. 'What am I to do? What ought I to do?'

'I have told you,' said Richard Cable. 'You must go to the Hall.'

Then Mrs. Cable closed her strong hand about Josephine's wrist; she did not speak, but she drew her with her. She did not wait to put anything over her head; she went forth as she was, and Josephine unresistingly went with her.

The house was in commotion. Aunt Judith was useless. She had retired to her own room and rang for sherry, as she felt faint. The

servants had lost their heads, and were ordering each other about to do impossible or useless things. No one attended to Miss Judith's bell, which rang violently every few minutes.

Mrs. Cable and Josephine entered unnoticed, and proceeded at once to the room where the unfortunate man lay. As they entered, Mr. Cornellis, who was there, started. He had been overhauling Gotham's secrétaire. He knew the will was there; but he wished to satisfy himself that it had not been destroyed. It was there, with the date on the envelope when it was made.

Gabriel Gotham had not been undressed; he lay on the bed just as he had been placed there, and his condition remained unaltered. His eyes were dull, like those of a man drunk with sleep, and his breathing was stertorous. There was certainly pressure on the brain. The pillow was stained with blood that flowed from a wound in the back of his head.

Mr. Cornellis took no notice of his daughter. He had not the smallest suspicion that she had attempted her life and been saved by Cable. He looked hard at her dress—she was in a gown of Mrs. Cable's that did not fit her—but he asked no question. He supposed his daughter had been playing some new

vagary, which did not greatly concern him, and about which he need not inquire. He said to Bessie Cable: 'Your son startled Mr. Gotham. He came in on him unexpectedly. Why Mr. Gotham should have been so surprised by seeing him I cannot tell; he sprang back as if he had seen a ghost, and though I put out my hand to save him, I was too late: he fell off the windstrew, and I fear has met with a fatal injury.—What do you want?' This was addressed to a servant-girl who hovered at the bedroom door with a frightened face.

'Please, sir,' said the girl, 'do you know where the key of the cellarette is? Miss Cornellis seed the master being took upstairs, and it has upset her so bad that she wants some sherry, and we don't know where the key is.'

'It is in your master's pocket,' said Mr. Cornellis. 'She must wait till it can be taken from him—till he is undressed.'

Steps were heard on the stairs. The surgeon had come.

'I have not ventured to have him touched till you could see him,' said Mr. Cornellis to the medical man. 'Poor fellow! poor fellow!' He was agitated; his voice shook, he turned his face away that his emotion might not be

seen. 'The whole thing was done so suddenly. It is a fearful shock to us all.' Then he repeated the account of how Gabriel fell, as he had given it to Bessie, only adding, whilst his eye was fixed on her: 'Why he started was no doubt this—he was astonished at the intrusion. My cousin was very tenacious of his privacy. How the man got in, I do not know.'

'By the gate,' said Josephine. 'I left it open.'

'Or what he wanted, I cannot conjecture,' added Mr. Cornellis.

'I cannot examine him till he is undressed,' said the surgeon. 'We must have a nurse.'

'I am here,' said Bessie. 'Let Mr. and Miss Cornellis leave the room.'

The ex-missionary hesitated a moment, and then complied. As he went through the door, he saw the maid again, who asked: 'Please, sir, have you got the key?'

'Key. What key?'

'Please, sir, Miss Cornellis has the hysterics for want of sherry. There goes her bell again.'

'Bother her sherry! Stand out of the way.'

Half an hour later, Mr. Cornellis was summoned.

The surgeon was a plain blunt man. 'I've overhauled him,' he said. 'It is of no use giving you false hopes. He can live only a few hours.'

Mr. Cornellis nodded; he was sure of this before the doctor came.

'Can you stay?' he asked.

'I will call again later. I can do no good. If I could I would stay.—Let Mrs. Cable remain with him; he must not be left alone.' Then he gave a few perfunctory directions and departed.

Cornellis looked at Bessie Cable with a sarcastic smile: 'Too late, my good woman.'

'Too late for what?' she asked, turning slowly, haughtily towards him. Poor and ignorant woman though she was, she had a certain stateliness in all her actions, a dignity in all she did.

'Merely, dear Mrs. Cable, that you are too late to get anything from him. He will not recover consciousness.'

'Too late to get?' she asked gravely, raising her tall form and looking coldly at the ex-missionary. 'To get what? I want nothing of him.'

'O no, my good woman; of course not. I know your story. You might, had you been in time, have secured something; but

—you are too late. He will never move hand or tongue again.'

'I—*I* take anything of him? *I* ask anything of him?' She shook her head. 'You may know my story, but you do not know me. I came, not to get, but to give.'

'To give what?'

'What you would neither understand nor value. Leave me alone with him.'

He did not care to remain. He went over to the secrétaire, locked it, and took away the key.

'You will call me if he is worse, if there is any change,' he said in a tone of indifference. He did not care to keep up appearances before Bessie Cable, who could injure or benefit him in no way. She slightly bowed her head. Then, twirling the key on his forefinger, he went out.

'Please, sir,' said the maid, 'is that the key? Miss Cornellis has pulled down the bellrope; she do want her sherry—awful!'

When Bessie Cable was alone in the room with Gabriel Gotham, she took the lamp, and with steady hand carried it to the bedside and held it up, that the light might fall full on him. He lay before her a poor broken wretch, with a bandage round his head, the back of which was crushed in, and with an injured

spine. Had the skull alone been fractured, the surgeon would have operated; with the broken spine it was useless. His eyelids were half closed; the glitter of the white of the eyes could be seen beneath them. His breathing was noisy, showing pressure on the brain. The weak mouth was half open, showing the teeth. There was no beauty, no nobility in the face, nothing to attract love.

Bessie had not so steadily and for long looked at him since he had betrayed and left her. Now, as she studied him, in the bright circle of light cast by the lamp, she thought how wonderful it was that, after their long separation, she should be with him again, that he should be without a loving hand to smooth his pillow, a tearful eye to watch for his last breath.

In that very room, many, many years ago, she had watched him when he was ill with scarlet fever. Then she had insisted on being his nurse, and she had attended him faithfully, till she herself took the fever. When she was ill, he did not come near her in the lodge.

She looked round the room. Old times came back. She tried to trace the features of the sick boy, laid on that same bed, in the face of the dying man. The face was much changed, and yet it was the same: the face is

the hieroglyph of the soul, the picture that gives expression to the idea. Here, all through life had been a cowardly, selfish, ignoble mind; and it had written its characters in every line and curve of the commonplace face.

As Bessie looked at him, her eyes were dry, a sternness was in them, and her brows were set as were her lips. When she knew he was injured and dying, she went to him. Who had such a right as she? In the time of his prosperity, she kept away; but when he was cast down and broken, she came to him, as was natural.

As she stood, considering his face, her mind ranged over the time they were together, their childhood, the protection she had extended to the feeble lad, and the love and pity, the love that had sprung out of the pity wherewith she had regarded him. She had loved him. She had loved none but him, and it seemed strange to herself now that this could have been.

Then she thought of the short happiness of their married life, and then the agony of her disenchantment. Now the hand that held the lamp began to tremble, and the lights and shadows about the sick man's face to dance; her hand trembled with wrath at the recollec-

tion of the injustice done her—done her by this man, lying before her.

The hand of God had sought and found him, and punished him. She believed Cornellis's story. What more probable than that the sudden apparition of his son should make Gabriel Gotham spring back, oblivious of the gap behind him? Could he have seen him appear and remain seated, unmoved? Her heart was filled with conflicting emotions—wrath at her wrong, pity for his condition.

'That is true which I said to him,' she muttered; 'the plant Forgiveness is hard to strike, and difficult to get to flower.'

He had embittered, he had ruined her whole life. She who had been so strong and confident, had lost her hope in life after her betrayal. Without any fault of her own, her character had been blasted; and a stain rested on her son. She had scarce mentioned his father to Richard, and Richard had refrained from asking about him. He feared to know all. She was a dishonoured woman in the eyes of her son; this wretched man on the bed had put a barrier of suspicion between her son and her. Richard could not regard her with that holy reverence that a son should have for a mother whose name is without a spot.

She had had a hard battle to fight for some

years to maintain herself and her child, too proud to accept assistance from the Gotham family. She, who might have been an honest man's wife, ruling her house, surrounded by her children, had been for long alone, poor, unhappy. Indeed, she had a great debt of wrong written up in her heart against this man she was now looking at.

In physics, all forces are correlated; heat and light are but different phases of the same force, which manifests itself now in one way, then in another; and heat translates itself into light, and light relapses into mere heat. It is the same in psychics. The various passions are correlated, various manifestations of the same energy. Love becomes momentarily hate, but then sometimes as momentarily reverts to love.

For nearly forty years Bessie Cable had nursed her wrongs, and had eaten out her heart with rage and gall; and now, as she looked at the cause of all her misery, the bitterness rose up and overflowed her soul; but at the same moment, Gabriel opened his eyes; for one brief instant they seemed to gather consciousness, and he muttered, 'Bessie!'

In a minute, all the hate, the wrath, were gone. In a minute, love, pity, sweetness,

gushed hot and strong through her heart. It is said that the Amazon is sometimes checked by belts of weed that form across the river, and weave into a vegetable felt, upwards, downwards, athwart, and in and out, making a dense impenetrable barrier; and the mighty stream, the main artery of a continent, is arrested, and thrown back to inundate vast tracts of land. Then, all at once it breaks its chain of green, and the mighty volume sweeps along its proper channel, carrying with it, in fragments rolled over and torn to shreds, the weedy belt. So is it with the human heart, so was it now with that of gray-haired Bessie Cable. Everything was forgotten—the wrongs, resentment, privations, heartaches, the woven and interlaced hedge of stubborn pride—all went down and went away in a moment, and the great natural artery of Love burst and poured forth and suffused the poor wretch on his deathbed—a creature as unconscious now of what he received as he had ever been inable of valuing that precious flood.

Wondrous is the generosity, the power of forgiveness in the human heart! Mercy, says Shakespeare, droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven upon the earth beneath; but forgiveness wells up from the deeps of the heart itself. It may be stamped down, and choked

and overpaved, till it seems that it is no more there; and yet at last, at an unconsidered moment, it breaks forth, it dissolves the hardest crust, and flows in newness, all-embracingness, purifying and refreshing.

Bessie was on her knees by the bed, and the tears rolled down her aged cheeks. She held the hand that had been given her once, and been withdrawn from her. She looked longingly at the dull eyes that had recognised her for a moment, listened to hear again her name coupled with a word of love from the lips that had spoken.

The house was still that night. The servants had gone to bed. Mr. Cornellis was in his own room; he was satisfied. In an hour or two the inheritance would be his, and his embarrassments at an end. Miss Judith was quiet; she had got her sherry.

Bessie was glad that she was undisturbed, that she was left alone with Gabriel that night when he passed away—but did not pass till the plant Forgiveness had flowered, and been laid on his dead heart.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE PILOT.

THE funeral of Mr. Gabriel Gotham, J.P.—he never gained the distinction of D.L.—was fairly well attended. The coffin was preceded by a detachment of police, walking two and two, wearing white gloves; and was followed by the Cornellis family and by several of the gentry of the neighbourhood. The coffin was of polished oak, with brass mountings. The church bell tolled; and the pulpit and altar and the family pew were in mourning. It was a funeral so flattering to the vanity of the dead man, that the wonder was he didn't rub his hands in his coffin and cackle a pleased laugh!

After the funeral, a few came back to the Hall to partake of refreshments whilst their carriages were being got ready. The rector speedily took off his surplice and scarf and curled up his black kid gloves, and came. The lawyer of the deceased was also there, a

local man, who lived in Hanford, who made out the leases for Mr. Gotham.

When the guests from a distance were gone, and only the rector and the solicitor remained, Justin Cornellis said with a sad smile: 'It is, I suppose, usual on these melancholy occasions to produce and read the will; but Mr. Coxe no doubt is aware of the arrangement made by my poor cousin. I have the key of his bureau. The will is in it, I believe. I will run upstairs and bring it down, if Mr. Coxe would like to see it. There is, however, no necessity; I will have it proved forthwith at Somerset House.'

'I have it, sir,' said the lawyer.

'You have it!' exclaimed Mr. Cornellis, stopping short on his way to the door.

'Mr. Gotham made his will at my office the day he met with his fatal accident; in fact, only a few hours before—perhaps not more than an hour and a half previous.'

'I beg your pardon! Is this possible? With what object?' Mr. Cornellis looked very blank.

'Well, sir, I suppose he changed his mind. I have the will here. It is short and to the point. The rector and my clerk witnessed it.'

'I came down to the beach,' said the

rector, 'when poor Gotham was there with Miss Josephine inspecting a new vessel just built by Grimes; and he, poor fellow, asked me to do him the favour of stepping with him to the office of his solicitor. It turned out that he wanted to make his will, and get me to attest it. I suppose he felt unwell that day; had some premonition of what would happen. I suspect the true explanation of his fall is that he had a stroke, and that is what made him lose his balance. It was an odd coincidence his making a will the same day he lost his faculties.'

'Let me look at it,' said Cornellis, huskily.

'Nothing can be simpler,' said the lawyer Coxe. 'He has left everything to your daughter, Miss Josephine—that is, to the rector, myself, and Mr. Cable, in trust for her, till she is of age, and not under coverture.—I must ask that Miss Cornellis may be present whilst I read the will, as it concerns her more than any one else.'

'And—myself?' stammered the ex-missionary.

'There is a hundred pounds apiece left to me, sir, to the rector, and Cable, as executors; to the servants, a small remembrance. That is all. You are not mentioned.'

Mr. Cornellis said no more. He rang the

bell for his daughter. He remained silent whilst the will was being read.

The rector and the solicitor left, and then he was alone with Josephine. The calmness he had assumed during the presence of the two gentlemen deserted him. He became limp in body and haggard in face. His usual assurance and self-confidence were gone, knocked down by this unexpected blow, and he did not know what line to take. He felt that his position was critical. The object of the wretched old squire was clear to him. Mr. Gotham had made Josephine his heiress because he believed she would marry Richard Cable; and he had so entangled her with Cable, that it would not be easy for her to break away without a slur remaining on her character. This was why he had advanced the money for the purchase of the boat, why he had had it called the 'Josephine'; and made the girl give it to Cable. This also was why he had made him trustee with the rector and Coxe.

He was no hero to his daughter; he had contemptuously flung away his natural opportunities of gaining her respect and securing her love; and now he regretted this mistake, because he was disappointed of his ambition and made dependent on her. He had wasted

all the money his wife had brought; nothing of it remained, except what he could secure from the insurance company, in compensation for his house and goods consumed by fire.

'Well, Josephine,' he said, not looking her in the face, 'luck smiles on you, and turns her back on me. Look at poor Gotham's old will. By it, everything fell to me; and now, at the last moment, when he was half-crazed, he went and made a fresh disposition of the property. I might contest the new will; indeed, I have a mind to serve a *caveat* against its being proved, till I have considered the matter. The new will is so preposterous that it cannot stand. Poor fellow! He was off his head when he made it. But it will not do to have quarrels in families. It would be a scandal if you and I were ranged against one another in court; and I propose a compromise.'

'I think, papa, you had better settle that with the trustees—Mr. Sellwood and Mr. Coxe and Richard Cable.'

He frowned. 'I can have nothing to do with Mr. Sellwood, nor you either, since you have refused his son! No, Josephine; I speak as a father to a child. I want no law; I want a fair arrangement between us. If you

satisfy me, I will withdraw my opposition to the will.'

'I do not know what the property of poor Cousin Gabriel is worth,' said Josephine.

'About two thousand five hundred gross; but nett, nothing like that sum.'

'Papa, I will talk the matter over with Richard——'

'Richard!' he exclaimed. 'What the deuce do you mean?'

'Richard Cable,' answered Josephine. 'I have put myself in his hands. I did so when I thought myself a poor girl; now I am rich, I cannot twist myself out of his hands.'

'Oh, as to that,' said her father, 'give yourself no concern; I'll manage it. What was absurd yesterday is impossible now.'

'I did not mean that I could not extricate myself, papa, but that I would not.'

'Then you are a fool,' said he bluntly—'a greater fool than I conceived you to be. The man is a vulgar sailor, talks broad Essex, and blows his nose with his fingers.'

'I beg your pardon, papa. He is a man of honour and integrity—a gentleman at heart.'

'I do not profess to know his heart. If his gentility is within, turn him inside out, please, before presenting him to me and the

world.' He laughed contemptuously. 'I suppose your mother-in-law will char for you—ninepence a day with six meals and her beer.'

Josephine coloured.

'As for the snivelling babies,' he said scornfully—'insist on a free application of soap, and the use of a tooth-comb before introducing them into this house.' Then, impatiently: 'Pshaw! The thing is too absurd. I cannot believe in such a climax of folly as that my own daughter should voluntarily set herself up to be the laughing-stock of the neighbourhood. I'll offer the lout a hundred pounds to marry Betty the scullery-maid, and get rid of him that way.'

'Papa,' said Josephine, with a troubled face, 'you cannot alter matters by talking in that way. You drove me mad the other day, and I tried to drown myself; then Richard saved me for the second time from death. I had no one to whom to look for succour, advice, comfort, and I turned to him.'

'There—there!' said Mr. Cornellis. 'Like a Newfoundland dog, I suppose, he went into the water after you. It does not follow that because a dog draws you out of the water, you are to worship and obey Ponto ever after; a pat and a bone will suffice for him. My

dear Josephine, it is only in the fairy tale that Beauty, when she marries the Beast, finds him transform himself into a glittering Prince. In real life, when Beauty thus descends, she finds the Beast become infinitely and degradingly more beastly.' Then, unable to keep his temper any longer under semblance of control, he left the room, took up his hat, and walked through the garden, out at the gate, and along the seawall to the Cables' cottage. He walked in, after having rapped at the door, with his hat on, and asked Mrs. Cable for her son. She told him he was in the garden, and he went through the house to him.

'Good evening,' he said, a little roughly, for his temper was nettled. 'I've come for a word or two with you.—What is this Miss Josephine tells me about her trying to drown herself, and throwing herself on your protection?'

Richard stood up, and looked Mr. Cornellis in the face gravely out of his clear steady eyes. 'Has she told you aught about it, sir?' he asked.

'Yes, she has—some rodomontade. I beg your pardon; you probably do not understand the word, and would be at a loss to spell it. Some nonsense, I mean. She tumbled into the mud, and you picked her out.'

'Sir, it happened as Miss Josephine said.'

'She entered into no particulars. She was in one of her tall moods, giving herself tiptoe airs. I do not care for the particulars. How she got into the mud is naught to me; how she got out is more my concern. Did she scramble out, or did you pull her out?'

'I brought her here, sir. She was in the water, not in the mud.'

'You brought her here! Why not to her home?'

'Because she refused to be taken home.'

'And then she threw herself on you for advice and protection—advice as to nothing, protection against nobody. Not a soul desired to hurt her, and it is a matter of no importance what and who advised her, for she is so headstrong that she will go only her own way.'

'What she asked me, sir,' said the sailor, 'and what was said, are between herself and me.'

'You refuse to tell me what passed?'

'Miss Josephine spoke to me in confidence.'

There was something so offensive and irritating in the tone of Mr. Cornellis, that Richard began to see how it was possible for the poor girl to be worked into a condition of

exasperation by her father, such that she should try to destroy herself.

The ex-missionary looked hard at the sailor, who met his eye frankly.

'I do not know what tomfoolery my daughter has been playing with you, but you will please to understand that whatever she said, she said in joke.'

'Miss Josephine knows that best, sir. If she spoke in joke—so; if in earnest—so.' He was not to be brow-beaten; he was calm, grave, and earnest.

'I do not know how she expressed herself; words are various in their meanings, and a simple word lightly said may be taken seriously, and have grave consequences. You must distinctly understand, my man, that Miss Cornellis has acted contrary to my wishes in coming here to play with your brats—children. There are children to be played with on her own level of life, without stooping to yours.—I mean no offence. Your children may be very nice and dear and all that sort of thing, but they are as apart from the sphere in which my daughter moves as if they belonged to the Dog-star.'

'The stars are above,' said Cable coolly.

Mr. Cornellis was beating about the bush. He did not want to admit that his daughter

had spoken seriously to him about an engagement with Cable; he desired to hear Cable's version of the interview, and then to take his course. But Richard was reserved. Mr. Justin Cornellis could get nothing out of him, and was himself losing his temper.

'Now, look here,' said he. 'My daughter has made you a present of a boat. I advanced the money. She gave it to you. I thought it would seem to come more gracefully from her; but don't you build any ambitions on that transaction. She owed you a debt, and has paid it; and she is now quit. I dare say she has said some nonsense to you since. Girls have no control over their fancies and tongues.—Mind you, my good fellow, I object to her coming here. If she returns, she will incur my severe displeasure; and I warn you that no serious intention lurks behind her words.'

'What words, sir?'

'Any words she may have said.'

Cable considered a moment, then he said with self-restraint: 'Sir, I have listened to what you have said; but I can't make much out of it. You don't wish the young lady to come here to see my kids; very well, sir. She shall not come if I can help it. I would not have one of my little girls disobey me;

and if I led your daughter into disobedience, I should expect to be punished in like manner in my own children.—But, sir, Miss Josephine spoke to me when she was much in earnest and was very unhappy. I know well we be of different build. She's a clipper yacht, and I a coal-barge; but that is neither here nor there. She appealed to me, and I answered her. If she meant naught by it, I am content. I will go with you to the Hall, sir, and see her in your presence, and she shall tell me what she means. Whichever way she decides, I am content.'

As the two men turned to leave the garden by the way of the bridge, Josephine herself appeared from under the willows, crossed the plank, opened the wicket, and came towards them.

'I knew papa had come here,' she said; 'so I have followed.'

'I am glad you are on the spot,' said Mr. Cornellis—but his looks belied his words—'that you may hear what I have been saying to Mr. Cable. I have told him that you have used random words to him, the purport of which I know, though I do not know the exact expressions used. You were excited at the time, possibly light-headed. Your words are not to be taken at the foot of the letter.

What you said in heat you regret in cool. A lady is always allowed to change her mind; and circumstances having altered, you have altered your purpose.—You will understand, Mr. Cable, that the girl is not of age.'

'Papa,' said Josephine, turning to him, and then to Cable, 'Richard—I can now say to both what must be said. I am not a weathercock. When I give my word I stick to it. I put myself in the hands of Richard Cable, and asked him to direct the course of my life, when I felt that I had lost confidence in you, papa—in every one; when I believed myself to be a poor girl without a penny. Mr. Cable does not know what has happened to alter my circumstances; that, however, does not alter my purpose, but intensifies my resolution. If before, when I was poor and without responsibilities, I wanted a help, now that I am well off, and am likely to have many responsibilities, I shall need assistance much more. He is the only man to whom I can look with perfect trust, and to him I still turn. I do not wish to reproach you, papa; but as you have mismanaged my little fortune left me by my mother, I do not wish you to play ducks and drakes with that bequeathed to me by my cousin. Besides, he did not appoint you executor and trustee, but he

appointed Richard Cable. There is no one—no one to whom I can look up as I look up to him. I dare say my choice will shock the neighbourhood; but I do not care: I must seek my own happiness and welfare above everything else. When a poor creature is drowning, she clings to the spar that is floating near her, and which she knows will sustain her, and does not apologise to the hencoops and empty barrels drifting around that she does not lay hold of them instead of the spar.'

Mr. Cornellis turned livid. 'Take care, Josephine; you almost persuade me that a lunatic asylum is your proper home.'

'I ask Richard Cable to protect me. He will see that I am not spirited away to a madhouse.—I am sorry,' she continued, 'very sorry, not at all glad, that Cousin Gotham has made me his heiress. I had ten thousand times rather have been a poor man's wife, in such a position that the road of duty was straight and clear before me. Now I fear my way will be less obvious; but I shall have one to steer me who is the best of pilots.' She extended her hand to Richard.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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